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GOD'S MESSAGE

GOD'S MESSAGE

Sermons and Addresses

By

George G. Findlay, B.A., D.D.

EDITED

with a Biographical Sketch

by his Daughter

Mary G. Findlay, M.Sc.

LONDON

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GEORGE GILLANDERS FINDLAY : A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

THE career of George Gillanders Findlay was one little marked by outward change or vicissitude. Though cradled in the Methodist Itinerancy and early enlisted in the ranks of its preachers, his manhood knew but two homes—the Theological Colleges situated respectively at Richmond, in Surrey, and at Headingley, near Leeds ; indeed the whole of the last thirty-eight years of his life, with a break of twelve months, was spent under the same roof, at Headingley.

His ancestry was of the north country : his father, James Findlay, who served as a Methodist Minister from 1840 to 1877, hailed as a lad from the fishing community on the Banffshire coast, while his mother was of Yorkshire farming stock. George was born in 1849, the first child in a family which came to include six sons and one daughter. He was educated at Pocklington Grammar School, at Woodhouse Grove, at Wesley College, Sheffield, and at Richmond College. At the age of nineteen he won the scholarship in Classics at the B.A.

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examination of the University of London, a noteworthy achievement in view of his youth and of the character of the facilities at his command. His interests in literature and in philosophy were life-long, and in his reading he ranged far and probed deep, while poetical thought and expression gave him unfailing pleasure. His chief concern was with Biblical study and research ; in recognition of his services in this field the University of St. Andrews, in 1901, honoured him with the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Writing in 1893 he says of himself : ' I am a son of the Conference. I learnt from my father, and in his person, to revere the Methodist ministry ; I learnt to love the Methodist people. My training has been received and my life spent amongst them. The Conference has made me a tutor to its young men. I have loved my work and lived for it. But I have striven first and last, amid much unworthiness and infirmity, to be a true preacher of the gospel of the grace of God ; and the Cross of Christ is my glory and joy.' To preach the gospel himself and to equip others for like service was the purpose which underlay and informed all his scholastic activities. His insatiate craving for knowledge, his persistence in research, his precision of workmanship, all were directed rather to the perfecting of an instrument for the hand of the Master Craftsman

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than to the accomplishing of a task or to the realizing of an ambition.

It is perhaps by his work on the Pauline Epistles¹ that Dr. Findlay will be longest remembered in the world of New Testament scholarship. Some of his findings may have been affected by subsequent research; but, by the general consent of the experts, his analysis alike of the Apostle's character and of the development of his doctrine is likely to retain a position among the classics of popular New Testament exposition produced in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. He published also a work in three small volumes on *The Books of the Prophets in their Historical Succession* (Kelly, 1900), and a study of the First Epistle of St. John under the title of *Fellowship in the Life Eternal*

¹ *The Epistle to the Colossians*, in the 'Pulpit Commentary' series (Kegan Paul & Co., 1880).

The Epistle to the Galatians (1888) and *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (1895), in the 'Expositor's Bible Series' (Hodder & Stoughton).

The Epistles to the Thessalonians in the 'Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges' (1891); and in the 'Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges' (1904).

The Apostle Paul: a Sketch of the Development of his Doctrine, by Mons. A. Sabatier, translated from the French by Miss A. M. Hellier. Edited by G. G. Findlay, with an additional essay (Hodder & Stoughton, 1887).

The Epistles of Paul the Apostle: a Sketch of their Origin and Contents (Kelly, 1895).

St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians in the 'Expositor's Greek Testament,' Volume II (Hodder & Stoughton, 1900).

Articles on *Paul the Apostle* in 'Hastings' Bible Dictionary' (1898) and on *The Epistle to the Romans* in Peake's single volume 'Commentary on the Bible' (1919).

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(Hodder and Stoughton, 1909). In 1894 he was appointed Fernley Lecturer, taking as his subject *Christian Doctrine and Morals viewed in their Connexion* (Kelly). A year or two earlier he delivered two addresses to Leeds Methodists on *The Church of Christ as set forth in the New Testament* which were subsequently published (Kelly); while in 1902 a small volume of his sermons appeared, entitled *The Things Above* (Kelly).

In view of the Centenary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, which fell in 1913, Dr. Findlay was asked some years earlier to prepare a history of the missionary operations of his Church. The projected work was to cover not only the period immediately under review, but the fifty years or so preceding this, during which Methodism had responded to many calls from overseas, although such activities were unorganized save by that restless 'committee of one,' Dr. Coke, and were almost unrecognized by Conference. The field to be surveyed was not only that served by the present-day Society, but included in its scope the States of North America prior to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1784), and the British Colonies in three continents to the dates at which Methodism in these several regions became organized under local Conferences.

Upon this task Dr. Findlay was still engaged

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within a month of his death. The first three volumes of the five which constitute the history as completed by W. W. Holdsworth and published (1921 *et seq.*) by the Epworth Press, were the work of the original author, considerations of space compelling, however, the omission of a number of chapters from Volume I; he had also accumulated material for use in the remaining volumes. During the Centenary year a compact survey of the whole field was published under the title of *Wesley's World Parish* (Hodder & Stoughton), in the preparation of which the writer was assisted by his eldest daughter,

Dr. Findlay was a worker of tireless industry. Methodical in his hours of rest and recreation, loving the open country-side and rejoicing in physical exertion, he ever had book or pen at hand and would return to his study with zest if not with impatience. What he read was stored in a mind well furnished, well articulated, and, though not nimble, admirably well under control. What he wrote he would revise and re-revise and work over till the importunity of his publishers availed to stay his emending hand. The feeling for the just and apt in expression was with him a passion, though he was saved from pedantry by the play of a trained imagination and of a keen sense of humour. The richness and variety of his vocabulary and his mastery of style were due to the integrity

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of his character, intellectual and moral, which made slovenliness of expression and glibness of phrasing alike impossible to him.

Though his temperament, no less than the exigencies of his calling, tended to hold him aloof from participation in public affairs, Dr. Findlay's opinion was sought from time to time on matters of business and administration. His habit of marshalling and weighing evidence, together with a sound and often shrewd judgement, enabled him, on occasion, usefully to counsel counsellors and to advise experts. In the sphere of Methodist policy, the questions to which he gave attention and upon which he spoke in Committee and, though this but rarely, in Conference, were for the most part concerned with his old school at Woodhouse Grove, with the training of candidates for the ministry, with Church membership and the maintenance of fellowship, and with Foreign Missions.

The jealous care with which he sought to safeguard Christian fellowship was a trait as characteristic as was his zeal for learning, or his loyalty to all related to him by ties of kinship or of common service. Among his brothers his influence as eldest was strong and, in some respects, formative, the more so as his mother died before she was fifty and his father but ten years later. George thus became guardian, father, and mother, to the rest,

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and his house became to them a second home. To colleagues he owed much, and he gave in his turn without stint : to William F. Moulton, to Benjamin Hellier, and to John Shaw Banks (this last his fellow-tutor for nearly thirty years) most of all. Though at no time in charge of a Church, he did not on this account hold himself absolved from pastoral responsibility ; indeed, he found deep satisfaction in his relations with the members of his Society Class, held in connexion with the Headingley Church, and in visiting a wide circle of friends, especially any who were lonely or in misfortune. Many of those who hold him dear will echo the words of one of their number : ‘ What Dr. Findlay did for me, only my heart knows.’

Family life and relationships meant more to him than even his children realized until the failure of his powers weakened the reserve with which a sensitive and deeply tender affection was wont to screen itself, and relaxed the concentration of mind which tended to keep the student a little apart from the life about him. He allowed his children an unusual measure of freedom in matters both of greater and of lesser importance, and even when, as occasionally happened, frankly perplexed by their behaviour or opinions, he seldom exerted the authority which indubitably he possessed.

He married, in 1875, Margaret Sanderson, youngest

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daughter of another north-country Methodist preacher, James Crosby Hindson, who travelled from 1824 to 1863. How much of Dr. Findlay's usefulness must be attributed to his wife's share in their life-partnership, none can say. The sedulous watchfulness with which she secured his hours of work from interruption and his hours of rest from needless anxiety, was to the scholar of essential importance. For many years, despite the pressure of household cares, she copied out by hand all that he published, and she always read his proofs and verified his references. But yet more vital to him than this was his assurance of her sympathy and co-operation with him in all his concerns, the sense that, though the personality of neither was ever merged in that of the other, though in the household the part of each was distinct and individual, in interest and in purpose they were always entirely one.

Eight children were born to them, five daughters and three sons, of whom seven survive. The second child was taken from their home when only a few months old. Her father often spoke her name, and would wonder, as her birthdays passed, by what stages the fair promise of her infancy was being fulfilled ; and when the time drew near that he too must leave us, he found comfort in the thought that the little one, who had passed that way some forty years before, was waiting to greet him on the

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other side. Babies and little children had for him an especial charm, and the attraction was mutual. How hilarious the brief evening romp in his children's nursery days when he would prance round the garden, an excited youngster on each shoulder, and one or two more capering in his train! How proud, nay triumphant, was he as he carried his first grandchild downstairs, stealing a march upon us all, and introduced her to a couple of bashful young bachelors from the College! A baptismal service always touched him deeply, and he often seemed reluctant to hand back to the parents the baby nestling in his arm.

Among his keenest delights must be mentioned such opportunities of foreign travel as came his way. Visits to India in 1903-4, and to Canada in 1911, brought him enrichment and stimulus which he turned to full account. Though unusually short-sighted, the result of study under adverse conditions in boyhood, he rejoiced with a quiet intensity of feeling in the beauties of nature. 'I don't know what I have done that I should be permitted to see all this!' he was heard to murmur to himself as he gazed at the panorama of mountain and lake and sky at Lucerne. The weariness of his last days was beguiled by memories of Switzerland and of Norway, their snowy peaks and azure skies, their sunshine and scent and colour.

The deep-rooted confidence and affection which

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bound him to his home-circle, made it possible for him, as the end drew near, to lay aside, with mind at rest and unperturbed, the work and habits of a life-time. His boys were preaching, his eldest son had entered upon a career not unlike his own, another was on the Indian mission-field where he himself, as a young man, had been fain to labour, his daughters were seeking, each in her own way, to serve the kingdom of God. The act of death he dreaded, but when, on the morning of Sunday, November 2, 1919, the time came, he knew nothing of its approach. The thoughts that upheld him while consciousness remained had centred round Dr. Watts' hymn: 'My God, the spring of all my joys,' and the words, 'To see and praise,' lingered upon his lips almost to the end.

The last piece of work on which Dr. Findlay was engaged, was a collection of twelve sermons for a volume in a series edited by Dr. Hastings, *The Scholar as Preacher*. This task he completed by a supreme effort of will. Post-war conditions in the publishing trade, however, compelled the abandonment of the project. Six of the sermons thus prepared for publication are included in the present volume¹; to these others have been added from the stock, numbering some hundred and fifty manuscripts, which is in the hands of the executors. The arrange-

¹ Numbers II, III, XI, XIV, XVI, and XVII.

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ment is chronological, with the exception of the last two sermons which have been transposed, the one giving its title to the book being placed last. A word may be said about the principle which the Editor has followed in making the selection. She has sought to render the volume as representative as might be of Dr. Findlay's teaching, both in its range and in its revelation of his personality. Sermons which were used repeatedly over a long period, being re-written more than once and developing with his development, find a place in it. So also do addresses which were prepared for the Headingley College Communion or Commemoration services, and, because of their intimacy, could not be used on more public occasions. It was in preaching to small village congregations and in addressing his own students that, as a rule, he found greatest freedom. He had neither the gifts nor the temperament of an orator. To small groups of listeners, to whom he was known personally and whom he knew, he could open his heart and reveal the deep things of God with a poignancy well nigh irresistible. 'He humbled me,' writes one of his hearers, 'but he had first of all humbled himself.'

It is primarily to those who were his students that this volume is addressed, for it was they who drew forth from him in its fulness the expression of the faith by which he lived and in which he died.

I

THE PROMISE AND THE POWER OF PRAYER

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.—
LUKE xi. 9.

HERE is the utterance of an Infinite Bounty, longing to bestow itself on the children of men ; but which finds them, alas, mistrustful, pre-occupied, and little concerned to receive the good gifts it has to offer. Perhaps the undertaking thus given on God's part is not always rightly understood ; and it requires not only a more earnest faith, but a more enlightened and discriminating faith, if our prayers are to prevail with the completeness and satisfaction which our Lord here assures us.

Ask, seek, knock : the triple invitation is no vain repetition, no trick of rhetorical emphasis. The three expressions give to prayer a wide scope ; they indicate the calling out of many faculties in its exercise, and the existence of manifold objects to be sought by it. Prayer is a various, rich, and multifiform thing ; for it covers the entire range of the soul's converse with God, its pursuit of all the aims

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and purposes which God has set before it. Prayer embraces all the activities of religion, the Godward movements of man's spirit, and promises to them complete attainment and fruition.

Jesus begins with *asking*. That is prayer in its elementary and essential form, the form most often exemplified by His own practice. The asking prayer is the simple, unstudied, direct expression of faith in God.

There is God the Father, All-loving, Almighty ; here am I, His needy, hungry child : what have I to do but to speak to Him and tell Him my wants as I feel them ? Here, in me, is uttermost necessity, craving, helpless, clinging to the trust and hope which He has kindled ; there, in Him, is bounty, sympathy, all-comprehending wisdom. The fulness there, the emptiness here ; and asking, the one thing needed to put the two into communication ! There is the reservoir, brimful of blessing, so near, so accessible ; it needs but the motion of a child's hand to lift the sluice and the stream bursts forth ! The showers are trembling in the air ; a sigh, an upward look of desiring faith, pierces the clouds and the floods descend upon the thirsty ground ! So Jesus conceived the possibilities of prayer, the rights of filial faith. But such prevalence with God, you see, implies a childlike relationship between the prayer-offerer and the Answerer. In St Matthew's record

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of the promise, our Lord illustrates its working from the familiar experiences of domestic life : ' What man is there of you who, if his son shall ask for a loaf, will give him a stone ? ' ' If ye then,' so He concludes, ' evil as you are, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall He, your Father in heaven ! ' You see, the whole basis of the asking, and the certainty of compliance lies in the home-feelings that link the asker and the giver. There is no magic about it, no mystical or mechanical efficacy in the formulae used : the force of the appeal consists absolutely in the kinship of the two parties, in the heart-bond uniting them, in the father's care for his offspring and the child's trustful, clinging affection toward his parent. When that little one turns to you a wistful look, when it raises a hungry cry, when it steals up and puts a tiny, trembling hand into yours, craving help, guidance, shelter, food, though you were the worst of men, your heart would melt into compassion. How much more our Heavenly Father !

This illustration, I think, goes far to explain why so many of our prayers to-day remain unanswered. To appeal to God in this fashion, we must become as little children. We are too wise and self-sufficient, too designing, too artificial and conventional, to ask with the child's straightforwardness. And we are too little hungry for the bread of God : there is not

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the plaintive note, the cry of famine, the hunger and thirst for righteousness in our supplications, which touches the heart of God. Above all, we are lacking towards Him in the confidence with which the babe seeks its mother's breast, with which the child that has roamed the fields, or bent for hours over a task in school, speeds home at the appointed time to find the table spread and the father's hand dealing forth the welcome supplies. When we know God the Father whom Jesus has shown to us ; when we know ourselves, His offspring, feeble, unworthy, childish, but full of need and furnished with the warrant of His promises, prayer will become a vastly more interesting and more successful business than it seems to be in our Churches at present. ' When ye pray, say " Our Father " '—that is the key to everything !

Further, the asking, as distinguished from the seeking prayer, is directed toward the gifts of pure Grace, toward those objects in whose obtaining human effort and contrivance have no part, the things which ' are not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.' The remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the joys and powers that His coming brings, these supreme bestowments, the essential, indispensable tokens of the Heavenly Father's love, we cannot earn or procure for ourselves in any degree ;

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we can only *ask* them, and 'wait' in respect of them (as Jesus said) 'for the promise of the Father.' We are in a most childish helplessness in regard to the most needful and precious things of life ; but with the child's necessity, we have the child's plea and warrant, the child's hold on the father's heart, the child's right to look up and claim from the Heavenly Father the best of all good things. Even as between ourselves, the things that are dearest, that make life sweet and the heart rich, are not bought ; they come by asking and by trusting : how much more as between the soul and God ! In the pardon of our sin, in the witnessings and quickenings of God's Spirit, in the daily light of His favour and the guidance of His providence, we have the expression of His fatherly, personal relation to ourselves, the innermost links that knit the soul to God, the experiences which are the very essence of religion as imparted to us by Jesus Christ. Here the command, ' Ask, and it shall be given you,' has its full scope and is sufficient by itself.

But the case is not always quite so simple. When Jesus says, ' *Seek*, and ye shall find,' there is something more than the bare asking in His thoughts : The very term ' asking ' implies in certain instances more than mere words : it must be put into deeds ; it involves acting, as well as speaking to God in the expression of our wants.

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Compare, for example, the fourth and fifth petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In praying, 'Forgive us our trespasses,' you ask in penitent faith, you cannot get beyond that ; you can do nothing to merit forgiveness, nothing to effect it for yourself. The pardon of sin is the sole and simple act of God, a pure outgoing of the Father's grace toward His sinful and sorrowful child. But in uttering the fourth petition, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' the situation is very different. You do not stop at the asking and wait for the needed provision to drop into your idle lap. You set to work ; you (or those who act for you) plough the fields and sow the grain, and grind the corn, and bake the loaf : God blesses your honest toil, and gives the increase. Such is the *seeking* prayer. The whole is God's work, who ' filleth all things in all,' as truly as in the other blessing of forgiveness, but not as simply and directly. In this order of things salvation is 'of him that willeth and that runneth,' and God works by working in His servants 'to will and to work of His good pleasure.' Thus, as St. James teaches us, 'Faith by works is made perfect,' developing its own energies and reaching its appointed goal. So the student seeking divine knowledge prays, 'Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law' ; but he expects God to answer that prayer, not by superseding, but

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by inspiring and directing his own study and diligence. If he prays, leaving his brain untasked, his books unopened, and the implements of knowledge lying to his hand unused, those 'wondrous things' will never dawn upon his vision. God has no blessing for the indolent, the unobservant and unthrifty, nor for the fanatic who turns prayer into a fetish and seems to think that the Holy Spirit puts a premium on imbecility and mental sloth. 'Seeking' means forethought, diligence, strenuous manful toil; it means the yielding of all our powers to God, heart and head and hands, in pursuit of the manifold ends He sets before us. It means that we not only trust in God's sovereign working for us, but set ourselves to be 'workers together with God' for our own and for the world's benefit. Such practical seeking is of the nature of prayer: it is prayer translated into action, prayer animating and commanding the activities of life, prayer sustained and made good by corresponding deeds. When the labourer, pleading for his own and his children's sustenance, has by his morning's supplication, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' consecrated his toil, and lives all day in the spirit of devotion, then his hand prays and every fibre of his body prays for the daily bread as he tills the furrows or reaps the golden grain. So is it in all honourable and piously ordered daily toil. Such seeking is

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necessary for the attainment of Christian character. 'Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, charity.' Holiness in its developed and ripened forms, Christian wisdom, moral strength and self-control, power in prayer, the full-grown manhood, the Christ-like qualities that enrich and beautify our existence and 'make us that we be neither barren nor unfruitful in the work of the Lord,' these are found by men who seek them, who have set their eye on the goal and press eagerly and with a single mind through the toilsome days, and in the face of every hindrance, toward the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

If great saints are rare amongst us, and men of signal usefulness and power, masters in Israel and leaders in the Church of God, are wanting, it is because few have sought this eminence, because we have not 'coveted earnestly' God's 'best gifts'; we have been content with the ordinary and the second-rate in Christian experience and service. We have not sought with our whole hearts the prizes of our calling, the perfect love, the finished purity, the fullness of the Spirit of power that are accessible to a diligent and persevering faith.

We are feeling throughout our Churches to-day our lack of progress, the shrinking of our numbers,

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the flagging of our work ; and we often put this decline of Methodism down to the lack of prayer as its principal cause. Prayer-meetings, every one admits, are at a discount amongst us : as St. James tells us, ' We have not, because we ask not.' But if our prayers, private or public, are to mean anything, they must be seeking and not idly asking, supplications. The prayers that prevail are the prayers of aroused and sincere men, with whom the spiritual ends of life are paramount ; men who are ready to spend and be spent to win the things they desire of God, and who put their very selves into their prayers, and offer with their prayers all their powers and means to God's use for the ends which His Spirit prompts them to seek in their uttered supplications.

St. Paul, the apostle of faith, speaks of those who ' by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour.' There is no other way of winning to the high summits of life. It is a shameful antinomian abuse of salvation by grace to make it an excuse for neglecting the task of sanctification. The Church's work is let down on every hand by the evangelical slackers and shirkers who seem to imagine that when St. Paul says, ' God's gift is not of works, lest any man should boast,' they are thereby absolved from effort and sacrifice in the interests of religion ; they ignore the sequel

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of their favourite text, which continues, 'Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them.' There is no prize but for those who 'run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.' Our loitering and ease, our softness and self-indulgence, our grasping at Christian privilege in the neglect of Christian duty, our indifference to the claims of holiness, our lack of courage and the ambition proper to Christ's good soldiers, have been the Church's undoing and make the accomplishment of great things for God in these days of great opportunity impossible. 'Seek' the highest and best that God has placed before you, with your whole being set upon it and every power bent to the pursuit, 'and you shall find.' Listless prayers, the prayers of men who make no striving toward the things they ask of God, justly remain unanswered; neither man nor God believes in them.

But there is a third element in effectual prayer on which our Lord insists when He bids His disciples '*knock*' that the door may 'be opened to them.'

You recall the parable of the knocking prayer furnished by St. Luke. It is midnight: the lights are extinguished in the house; the family are in their beds asleep. But they are disturbed by a persistent sound, a loud rapping at the door. The

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householder leans from the casement: 'Who's there?' he cries; 'what is the matter?' 'Oh,' says the voice from below, 'I am your friend, So-and-So, and I am in a difficulty. A friend has just arrived unexpectedly; he has travelled far and is hungry, and my store happens to be empty. Will you lend me three loaves?' 'No, no,' the reply comes. 'You are too late; you must not disturb us at this untimely hour! Go away, and wait till morning'; and the angry master of the house slams to the window and hurries back to his bed, dismissing the annoyance. But the knocking is renewed, more loudly than before—*rap, rap, rap!* There will be no sleep for that house till the applicant is satisfied. The surly householder is compelled to leave his couch again, to go down to the pantry and supply the irrepressible need. 'And I say unto you,' adds Jesus, 'knock, and it shall be opened to you.' If the selfish, sleep-beset neighbour is moved by such compulsion, how much more your generous and unsleeping Almighty Father!

You have yourself, perhaps, been in some such emergency. Your darling child suddenly was seized with alarming illness. You went at night to seek the physician's help. You knocked at his door once, twice; there was no response! Did you turn away, despairing of relief? No;

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you stood there, plying that knocker, beating at that door, till all the neighbourhood echoed with your blows. You would have beaten in the physician's house-door rather than be refused ! Your child's life was at stake ! Now pray like that, and you'll get something !

Knocking means persistence, a resolution that will not be denied, a desperate importunity. It seems that obstinacy, sheer force of will that has any kind of right behind it, counts with God. He is the sovereign will of the universe, whose fiat has created heaven and earth ; His image in man is seen above all in the mysterious, incalculable quality wherein the force of personal being mainly consists. You say of some man who lays his plans and his hopes in life before you, ' He is bound to succeed : it's not so much talent, cleverness, but courage and determination that will carry him through. There's *go* in the man ; nothing will stop him ! ' This dogged energy is the greatest feature of the English race. We are not cleverer and quicker than other people, certainly not more amiable and ingratiating ; but it does seem that we are more determined, that, when our mind is made up, we can, as we say, ' stick it,' and set ourselves to see the business through that we have taken in hand. And this importunity Christ commends in our dealing with God, and God Himself delights

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in and rewards it. Our very English grammar testifies to the principle in question. We conjugate the future in terms of duty and of resolution : ' I shall, thou wilt, he will,'—' shall ' means duty, ' will ' means determination. Those two in combination create the moral future. We put this power to proof sometimes in our children. There is some trifling boon you desire to give to your boy ; but you mean him to have a struggle first. You hold the treasure in your clenched hand, and you say : ' Now, my lad, you shall have this if you can get it.' The little fellow climbs on to your knee, and sets himself to work : he tugs and he tries ! Those soft tiny fingers wind themselves about your stiff hand, worming their way in, straining their feeble strength, twisting and turning now in this direction, now in that, and never giving up. The boy grows more and more passionate in the impossible task, till at last you are weary of resisting : the father's hand flies open, and the blessing is gained ! God in some matters deals with His children, I think, in the like fashion. There are things He withholds from us till we come to the pitch of desperation, gifts that we should be unfit to handle, powers we should be too feeble, too slack, to use, until our strength of will and soul has been drawn out in the mightier energies and importunities of prayer.

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Look at wrestling Jacob! All night he has contended with the mysterious Stranger. His strength is spent; his thigh is disabled; he can only cling helplessly to his opponent. The Antagonist exclaims, 'Let me go; the day is breaking!' But poor Jacob is desperate: the dawning light brings him ruin, unless he win some blessing from the Mighty One in whose grasp he is impotent. Now he sees his opportunity and clasps Him more tenaciously than ever, while he cries out: 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!' It is enough; the Almighty yields to the will of a frail, struggling man. 'He blessed him there! Thy name,' God said, 'shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel [God's prince], for as a prince thou hast power with God, and with men thou shalt prevail.'

You, perchance, are *Jacob* now, the supplanter, the self-seeker. Bow before God in utter submission. Take hold of the strength of His declared love to you and the promises of His grace sealed to you in Christ. Plead with Him in patient indomitable prayer. 'Ask, seek, *knock*!' And you shall rise from your knees with a new name upon you, a redeemed and princely man, a child of God and a captain of salvation for your fellows.

II

WORSHIP, TESTIMONY, FELLOWSHIP

Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water : let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not ; for he is faithful that promised : and let us consider one another to provoke to love and good works ; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another ; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.—HEB. x. 22-25.

IN these words three things are enjoined upon us as believers in Christ : Worship, Testimony, Fellowship. These are the three practical parts of our religion as it is the expression in turn of our faith, hope, and love, and as it relates us respectively to God, to the world, and to the Church.

The passage of Scripture before us has a comprehensive import. It gathers up the main conclusion of the sublime and glorious doctrine that occupies the former chapters of this wonderful Epistle, in which we see the Old Testament transfigured into the New ; in which we seem to hear Moses and Elias once more talking with Jesus of the accomplished de cease and the fulfilled law and the better sanctuary. The Epistle to the Hebrews is like

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Hermon and Pisgah at once, a mount of transfiguration and of prophetic vision ; it is a chain of mountain heights running along the border of the two dispensations, and enabling us to survey both in turn from many different but harmonious points of view. And our text is one of its most commanding summits, from which there spreads before the eyes of the Hebrew readers the wide and rich prospect of Christian life and experience, in its contact with the narrower and harder field of Israelite discipline that they are now to leave behind them. They are henceforth to worship a God graciously accessible and conversable through faith ; they are to confess a sure and joyous hope in a world full of despair ; and they are to live in a frank and stimulating fellowship of brotherly love towards each other, prompting them to the employment of all their powers in life's true work.

First of all then, religion is *worship*. Nothing else, no matter how urgent and necessary, no matter how pleasurable and inviting, no matter how profitable and instructive, may be allowed to supersede or trench upon that. The worship of God can never be put in the second place, nor made an optional or auxiliary thing amongst human duties. The necessity of worship is the prime dictate imposed by the being of God and by the nature of man, the homage of the created intelligence

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to its Creator, the communion of the human spirit with the Divine. The need of worship belongs to the constitutional facts of our nature ; its exercise is a primary function of our spiritual frame. In whatever distorted forms it may appear, amongst the ignorant and embruted, or amongst the refined and instructed of our race, everywhere this grand instinct asserts itself. Suppressed or perverted in individuals, but never wanting in any community, there exists in us all, deeper down than the senses and the logical reason, a spiritual impulse and gravitation towards God ; a summons of the conscience, a craving of the heart is heard in the truest moments of life which says : ' O come, let us worship and bow down ; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.'

So that the man who does not worship, publicly as a member of the human family, and privately in his personal relationship to his Maker and Saviour, is forgetting his true distinction and nobility as a man ; he separates himself from the congregation of all loyal and well-disposed intelligences throughout the world, and at the same time he cuts himself off from the eternal springs of moral strength and freedom, of true joy and life for men. From the lowest to the highest, ' out of the mouth of babes and sucklings ' or amid ' the glowing seraphs round the throne,' the praise and worship of the

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infinite God engage the thoughts of every true heart and enlightened mind in the universe that He has made. Alike in the old dispensation and the new, in heaven or on earth, religion is worship, and worship is the supreme duty, and should be the supreme joy, of every conscious and rational creature.

But observe the summons to Christian worship : ' Let us draw near ! ' That meant to these pious Hebrews a revolution in their religious ideas, their practice of devotion. ' Draw not nigh hither,' was said to Moses, as he approached God's presence in the burning bush. ' Set bounds to the people round about ; set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it,' was the order of the day when Israel drew near to Sinai ; and ' if so much as a beast touched the mountain,' we are told later in this Epistle, ' it should be stoned.' This prohibition stamped itself upon the Old Testament religion, and took effect in the Mosaic ritual and priesthood and in the structure of the temple. That whole economy was in truth an elaborate system of guards and barriers, fencing off an unholy people from too near access to a too holy God.

In the construction of the Jewish tabernacle and temple, there was the outer court where devout Gentiles might pay homage to the God of Israel afar off. Beyond ' the middle wall of partition,' which no Gentile might pass on pain of death,

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came the court of the people, where every man of Israel, duly purified, might enter to witness the daily sacrifice and join in the annual feasts. Within that wide area, and raised above it, was the court of the priests, with the great altar of sacrifice and the laver of purification at which they ministered. Within the court of the priests stood the temple itself shrouded from view, with its altar of incense and golden candlestick and table of consecrated bread, entered only by select priests in due order at the appointed times. Then within the temple still another fence, the veil separating the Holy from the Most Holy place, where the immediate presence of God was represented by the cloud above the Covenant-ark and between the wings of the Cherubim. Behind that veil the High Priest alone might pass, and he but once a year, on the day of atonement, 'and that not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people.'

All this has passed away. The veil is rent, the wall of partition is broken down; the priests are disbanded and dismissed; and 'not one stone' of that old Jewish temple, erected at so much cost and the object of such scrupulous care and of so many awful sanctions and severe statutes, 'has been left upon another.' 'The line of confusion and the plummet of emptiness' has been cast over

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it all. But the lesson remains, and it is this : ' Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever.' Under the institutions of the Old Covenant, in the religious experience and attitude of the men of Israel, you find a sense of the holiness of God, of His near presence, and the moral splendour and majesty of His attributes, that distinguishes the Israelite from all Pagan forms of worship and religion ; and of this faith in the Holy One of Israel, the Christian Church is the heir and trustee. There has been wrought into the conscience of Israel by this means, and through Israel into the conscience of mankind, the truth that God is a holy being, and worship is a serious and solemn thing.

Alas for you and me, if we have not learnt that lesson ! Better Jewish ritual than Christian irreverence. The ritualism and sacerdotalism we denounce and dread so much, are the nemesis of irreverence, the inevitable and the just consequence of the abuse of evangelical liberties. The ritualistic revival means the Church going back to the school of Judaism ; it means God once more driving back from His presence those who draw near profanely, and saying : ' Set bounds to the people round about.' Serious and earnest men who wish to worship with godly fear will prefer a ritualistic service conducted with solemnity to evangelical

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worship spoilt by levity and indecorum. 'Let us draw near'; but not in heedlessness and self-complacency, with easy step and presumptuous lip and shallow thought, as men who dare take liberties with God; not with the assurance of a false and vain heart, but 'with a true heart in full assurance of faith.'

For what is the faith that gives Christian assurance and empowers us to draw nigh to God? What was the instrument that removed the old barriers and 'opened a new and living way into the holiest place,' enabling these Hebrews as privileged sons and consecrated priests to approach God at the mercy-seat and in the inmost shrine of His presence? You were 'brought nigh,' says the Apostle to Jews and Gentiles alike, 'in the blood of Jesus, were reconciled to God in one body through the cross.' The new strange pathway that you tread, leading across those levelled barriers and through the rent veils of ancient religion, is 'sprinkled with His blood.' Don't you see it on the road that you are treading? Can you trample on that blood of 'the covenant wherewith you were sanctified, and count it,' by your levity, by your impenitence and irreverence and wantonness of mood, as 'an unholy thing'? That blood of Jesus, which cleanses the worshipper from sin, is the one and sufficient guard of the sacredness of Christian worship. While it

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opens the way to every sinner, sweeping down all barriers in the path, it surrounds the approach to God with a sacredness and awe which no pomp of ceremonial and splendour of material circumstance can impose upon the worshipper.

We come to Mount Zion beneath the shadow of Calvary, to the holiest of all presences by the holiest of all ways. Christian piety is deeper, more humble, more tender, more full of awe and wonder than the best worship of Judaism could be ; and the boldness of access that belongs to gospel-faith carries with it a richer and finer reverence than that which is nourished on the formalities of elaborated ritual and priestly officiation. But, as the old proverb says, ' The best things, corrupted, turn out worst.' There is nothing more offensive to God and more intolerable to man, nothing more like the salt that has lost its savour, nothing more spiritless and nauseous, than evangelical worship with the true heart and assurance of faith departed from it ; nothing more profane than the loose and careless freedom of men who draw near to God with rash mouth and vain heart unabashed before the Divine glory, unsprinkled and unsanctified by that blood which alone gives to sinful men the right of entrance to the Holy Place.

While we are encouraged to ' draw near in the assurance of faith,' we are bidden at the same

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time to 'hold fast *the confession of our hope* without wavering.' There is a close connexion between these two exhortations. Christian worship is carried on in the light of the future. It is made possible by the 'bringing in of a better hope, through which,' the writer says, 'we draw nigh to God.' Under the old covenant, the shadow of death still lay between the soul and Him, darkening all the ways of access. You feel how in the Psalms this fear troubles and clouds the spirit of worship, and checks the soul again and again as it soars upward to the Divine presence. But in the gospel 'life and immortality are brought to light.' No longer do we mourn before God: 'In death there is no remembrance of Thee; in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?' The assurance of faith, the soul's present confidence in God and love to Him, the rapture and grandeur of worship are immeasurably heightened by this widened prospect and this added security. The High Priest, under whom our Christian worship is conducted, has 'entered within the veil' of the heavenly sanctuary; He has entered as our 'Forerunner' linking earth to heaven, and making our present worship in these lower and perishing courts of the Lord's house a prelude and preparation for the everlasting and perfect worship of God's true temple and city, where the 'spirits of just men made perfect' are united

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with the congregation of angels in the service of the better sanctuary. But when the Apostle speaks of 'the *confession*' or '*profession* of our hope,' he is thinking of the believer's attitude and relation to the world rather than to God. He is urging the readers to witness and maintain before their fellow men that good hope which distinguishes them as Christians from the world around them. For the times were full of gloom and despair, especially for the Jewish people. This Epistle was in all likelihood contemporaneous with the outbreak of the Jewish war with Rome, which was to end in the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish nationality. 'The day' was 'approaching,' which Jesus had predicted and to which prophecy had been pointing for ages, that would bring ruin on the Holy City, the temple, the priesthood, and the institutions of Judaism.

To a pious Hebrew this calamity was a shock the most dreadful that could be conceived; it was to him as 'the end of all things.' Everything that his faith built upon and his passionate heart clung to was bound up with the fate of 'the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.' For a Christian Hebrew in face of this utter overthrow still to 'hold fast the beginning of' his 'confidence firm unto the end,' and to see the new city of God, the spiritual Church of Christ, rising fair and clear

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above the smoking and blood-stained ruins of the earthly Zion, was the strongest possible proof of the reality and power of his faith and the most effectual testimony he could give to his distracted and desperate fellow-countrymen.

Does not that situation read a lesson to these latter days? We live also in times of transition and uncertainty, times of deep unrest. A shaking is going on, now as then, of things that have long stood fast, a testing of old faiths, of great systems and institutions, and 'a removing of things that are shaken as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' We belong to a world of doomed and dying men, for whom the day is fast approaching which ends all hope that has not its 'anchor cast' with Christ 'within the veil.' There is nothing so sad as to live in a world like this without hope of a better. Many around us, alas, are so living, 'having no hope and without God in the world.' It is the testimony of our hope that the men of our time need and will welcome, more than any other service we can render them. Most of all, in the great critical sorrows of life, when the storms sweep down upon our little shelter, when death comes between the soul and that which it loves best, what man is there so steeped in scepticism, so schooled in unbelief, that he will not crave for some ray of light upon

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the future? And there is no hope but the Christian hope; every other refuge fails; every other anchor drags. If that hope of the gospel is in you and you hold it fast and confess it faithfully, it will shine out on smitten hearts and anxious, care-worn spirits around you, and you shall be, like your Master, a 'light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide' their 'feet into the way of peace.'

We are bidden to add to the faith of a true heart toward God, and to the confession of a stedfast hope before the dying world, the *love* which, where it dwells in the heart, will not fail to find expression in the thoughtful consideration of, and affectionate and frequent *communion with, our brethren* in Christ.

Suffice it to say that this is a third part of our religion, as vital as the other two, which can only exist in a maimed and feeble form without it. Christianity is a social no less than a personal religion. To save individual souls is but half its task; it has to reform communities, to build up a Church, to recreate society upon a spiritual basis. Our own Methodism exists specifically for this object: to witness to the spiritual character of the Church, as constituted by the living fellowship of believing men, the brotherhood of souls in Jesus Christ. Of this communion the Lord's Supper is the appointed seal and privilege, a privilege to

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which those have no moral right who refuse to take their part in the sympathies and sacrifices of Church-membership. Let us listen to the exhortation needed again to-day as in the first age ; and let us not ' forsake the assembling of ourselves together ' in the social means of grace, ' as the manner of some is' ; but ' let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. And so much the more ' as life goes on and each of us grows older, and ' the day approaches ' when all the interests and pleasures of worldly society will prove for us mere vanity, even ' as a dream when one awaketh,' and only so much of life will remain and will prove our abiding treasure as we have given to the worship of God, to the testimony of Jesus, and to the fellowship of true faith and love toward Him.

III

A DEBTOR TO EVERY MAN

I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.—ROM. i. 14.

So speaks Saul of Tarsus, a Jewish Rabbi, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, the man in whom you would expect to find pride of race and religious exclusiveness in their highest degree. So much the grace of God in Jesus Christ had changed him. Add to the enumeration of St. Paul's creditors his fellow Israelites, his debt to whom goes without saying, and we understand him to proclaim: 'I am a debtor to every man, fellow countryman or foreigner, civilized or savage, whosoever he be that wears the form and has within him the soul of a man, there is one who holds upon me a bond for the payment of a certain debt; and that debt is the gospel of Jesus Christ. So,' he goes on to say, 'in discharge of this obligation, I am ready to preach the gospel of Christ to you that are at Rome also.' In this declaration we touch the mainspring of St. Paul's marvellous career. Here lay the secret

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of his missionary ardour, the motive power which drove him with restless, remorseless energy, 'from Jerusalem round about Illyricum' and still forwards to Rome and the bounds of the West, never satisfied till he had 'fully preached the gospel of Christ and made known the savour of the knowledge of Him in every place.' All his toils and sacrifices, his splendid and immortal services to mankind, were in Paul's eyes but the poor payment of the immeasurable debt due to his Redeemer. Your indebtedness and mine is no less than that of Paul ; it is owing to the same Lord and Saviour, and it is to be paid in the same quarter.

This powerful motive, this sense of religious obligation to their kind, has actuated in some form or other most of the great benefactors of our race. The loftier the character of such men, the greater the benefits they have conferred upon others, the less disposed do you find them, as a rule, to take credit to themselves for anything they do, the more sensible of what is due from them to their fellows. Humility and gratefulness are notes of true magnanimity. The opposite type of character we know too well—the sort of man who magnifies his rights and minimizes his duties, who is always looking out for what he can get at the expense of others, rather than for what he can do to serve them, who has a keen eye for the credit side

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of the account he keeps with the world, but for the debit column a most dull and lenient eye ; the grasping, grumbling, thankless sort of person, who ignores his weightiest obligations both to God and man. Such men, when they render their account of their stewardship to the Master of life, are likely to find themselves morally bankrupt and undone, doomed to a prison from which they shall not ' depart till they have paid the uttermost farthing.' We may judge ourselves by this principle of the Apostle. Our practical sense of our duty to mankind is a fair index to our own spiritual standing.

Stated broadly, the truth underlying the Apostle's personal testimony is, that *the gospel of Jesus Christ constitutes every man who possesses it a debtor on its account to all mankind.* Like most of the great maxims of Christianity, this principle has its basis in human nature. There is a fellow-feeling in the race, a sentiment of humanity, often wanting in individuals (whom for this reason we call *inhuman*) but which is never absent in any community of men. No society built on pure self-interest would hold together for a week, not even a herd of beasts. The instinct of humanity is a loud witness for God ; it is a vestige of creation. Through all their wanderings and their wars men have carried with them a dim remembrance of the time when they were one family in Eden, and the promise of a day when

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the flaming sword shall be removed, when 'wars shall cease unto the ends of the earth,' when the brand of Cain shall be effaced from the human brow and 'man to man the world o'er, shall brithers be for a' that!' Of this remembrance and this hope of a common humanity and covenant of nations, Jesus Christ is the guardian and trustee.

I know that there are those secularists, and humanitarians of the secularist type, who seek this end by other means, who claim for their own that principle they first learnt from Jesus Christ, and attempt to make of it a religion and a sufficient rule of life by itself. It is not in the nature of things that they should succeed. The Brotherhood of men rests on the Fatherhood of God: history has demonstrated this times without number. No power has proved strong enough to tame the selfish, divisive passions of the human soul except 'the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Yet we admit that whosoever goes about amongst his fellow-men, like Moses, saying: 'Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?' is so far preaching God's truth and we bid him 'God speed!' Only let him do it by God's grace, and in Christ's all-prevalent Name. The solidarity of mankind, this sense of a natural religious obligation binding men together, is no mere enthusiastic, impracticable ideal, but a fundamental reality,

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entering more and more into the ongoings and interactions of world life as it is. There is practical unity of interests, in both moral and material things, which binds the races of men together. Europe could not close her ears to the cries of Macedonia or Armenia under Turkish butchery and oppression, without the whole fabric of her peace being shaken. If China, in her present convulsions, be left without the hope and healing of the gospel, all Christendom (you may be sure) will have to pay for the neglect. It is mere fatuity to repeat Cain's question: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Is it nothing to the hand what may happen to the eye? Humanity is a single corporate organism; in the long run every member of it is bound to suffer by what is allowed to go on in its remotest corners.

We are, in fact, born debtors—dependent from our mother's milk on a care which we never deserved, which we shall never wholly repay. Every morsel of bread we eat, every shred of clothes we wear, has been prepared for us by careful and skilful and laborious human hands. The money we pay in the purchase of our acquisitions is a token of the obligations we are under for the necessities of life; it is by no means a discharge of the debt. Subtract from your belongings all that you owe to your forefathers, to the good and wise and brave of your own times and of forgotten ages, and how much,

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pray, is there left remaining to your personal credit? What is there on which you can with assurance lay your finger and say: 'Now this is absolutely my own. No one helped me to it; no fellow man has contributed to my possession and enjoyment of it!' How little, every thoughtful man will confess, is the utmost he can do for his fellows in comparison with what they unitedly have done for him. And the heaviest of our debts are not those we can set down in a ledger or discharge by a cash payment. The more intimate and dear are the obligations of life, so much the harder is it to take a just account of them and to make a fitting return for them. There are those to whom we shall be debtors to all eternity for some act of kindness and forbearance, for a word instilling some noble principle, for some pure and high example to which under God we owe our very selves, all that is best in our hopes and aims. Our obligations of a hundred kinds, to our fellow men of all times and races, form a network extending in every direction and to an infinite distance, which constitutes the very tissue and web of our existence. As we see it spreading around us, and examine its manifold implications and involvements, we are compelled to say, with the wise Apostle: 'Why, surely, I am a debtor to every man.'

How interesting it would be, if time allowed, to

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trace out our indebtedness along the lines indicated by St. Paul in this text : to the Jews, of whom, next to his Master, he was the greatest, to whom under God, we owe the Bible and the teaching of revealed religion ; to the Greeks in whose language he wrote, the beginners of philosophy and science, teachers of the fine arts and of all the refinements of civilization ; to the Romans, the founders of civil law and European government ; to our own rude but heroic forefathers, from whom descend the vigour and enterprise of the British race ; our debt to the wise of every age, poets, sages, statesmen, inventors, teachers of religions ; and to the comparatively unwise and undistinguished, the toiling millions, whose labours and patience have slowly built up the fabric of the world. Let me urge the young people to read history, the history of their own country, the history of civilization and of the Church, that they may know what their ancestors were like, and what a grand inheritance is theirs as Englishmen and Christians. And there will surely spring up in your hearts a great desire and ambition to serve the future as the past has served you, and to hand down your heritage improved and not impoverished for your holding of it. But for you and me, Christian brethren, there is one obligation which rises high above all others ' as the heavens are higher than the earth.' We owe much

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to kindred and country, to men of other lands and ages ; we owe everything to Christ our Saviour, to God our Heavenly Father. Our relationship to God in Christ underlies and overarches every other relation in life ; this obligation runs through and sanctifies and enhances every other obligation under which we rest toward other men. Our duty to Christ, the Divine Master, binds firmly the ties which link us to our fellows by binding us each eternally in worship and in duty to God.

We come back to the principle from which we set out in interpreting the text, and may re-state it as follows : ‘ The gospel of Christ is no man’s private possession ; it is held in trust by each man for the world of men. The knowledge of it involves the obligation to make it known. You hold it on the understanding that you will spread it. You keep it on condition that you impart it to your kind. Otherwise, it slips from you, infallibly. The Christian faith cannot live in a self-centred heart.’

Our personal knowledge of Jesus Christ makes us debtors on His account to the whole family of man. This is the staple missionary argument. Let me urge it upon you by two final considerations. Remember, first, that *the gospel of our salvation came to us through a human medium* : ‘ By man came death ; by man came also the resurrection of the

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dead.' By man, sin ; by man, salvation too. Let us never forget that if we owe our Christian blessings to the fatherly redeeming love of God, we owe them at the same time to the devotion and sacrificial sufferings of a man, of the Son of Man, the head and representative of our own race 'The man Christ Jesus' stands evermore our 'Mediator at the right hand of the throne of God'; every syllable that stands in the Book of God was penned by a man's hand. The light that guides your daily steps, that checks your wanderings, that cheers your sorrows ; your sense of right ; your hope of heaven ; your faith in God and in the future, all that you know of religion and of the true worth and meaning of life, has come to you from men ; and to men you must pay it back without stinting or slackness.

Jesus Christ is one with humanity, and eternally, man with men, the life and soul of the race whose features He wore, whose death He has died. He will not be separated in anything from His brethren. Let us no longer look at humanity in the poor, fallen, discrowned Adam ; but in the new, noble perfect manhood of Jesus Christ. Let us view each other and the whole world of mankind as God looks at us all for our salvation, in and through Him ; and we shall regard our neighbours with new eyes, with a larger and tenderer vision. If you have

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received a great kindness from any one in time past, you regard any member of his family with affection on his account. You love the son for his mother's sake, respect and treat kindly the foreigner, feeling that he has claims upon you, if one of his nation has served you well in former days. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ has made Himself the brother of every soul on earth : so keen was His love, so close His kinship to our humanity, that ' by God's grace He tasted death for every man.' Knowing this stupendous fact, redeemed by faith in it from selfishness and sin, we are constrained to see written on the brow of each man or woman we meet, written by the finger of God's mercy in the blood of Calvary : ' Thy brother, thy sister, for whom Christ died.' If this be so, no one who believes in the salvation of the Cross with any sense of what it means, can pretend to be uninterested in Foreign Missions.

Further, *our individual salvation was conferred upon us for man universally.* ' As is the offence so also is the free gift,' cries the Apostle. Now ' the offence ' of Adam is admittedly universal in its effect and consequence. Wherever you find a man, you find a sinner. Wherever man's foot has trod, it has left the trail of guilt behind it. Then by the same token the mission of Divine Grace is universal, and the remedy is designed everywhere

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to pursue and overtake the disease. Suppose that you belonged to some city, some tribe, that had fallen into condemnation with the Government, involving a heavy penalty ; and suppose you had been called out from the rest to receive pardon and at the same time commissioned to convey the king's message to your fellows, purporting that on certain terms they should share in the indemnity. If, to save yourself trouble, you merely slipped away, glad to escape with a whole skin and indifferent to the fate of your fellow citizens and partners in offence, could anything be counted more mean and more dishonourable than such conduct ? Would not the ingrate most justly forfeit the pardon he had received ? That is precisely the position of Christians who profess to have received the grace of God in the gospel and yet make no adequate or sustained effort to convey that grace of pardon to others, who are in fact indifferent to the condition of the mass of mankind, and shamelessly declare that they ' take no interest in Foreign Missions and the salvation of the Heathen is no concern of theirs.' Such blindness and hardness of heart shows how little the grace that brings salvation has affected themselves, how remote their disposition and temper are from the Spirit of the Cross of Jesus. You have not forgotten, surely, how your salvation came to you, how you felt under God's condemnation the

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burden of our common nature, the sin of the whole world resting on your conscience, ruining your life? You heard your cries of self-reproach echoed on every side: 'I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips! Woe is me!' You found yourself, in fact, a communist in sin and death!

And when deliverance came, it wore the same universal, world-embracing aspect and promise for the race. Your pardon was received from God as an acquittance inspoken to the individual soul, but on the broadest human conditions; joyfully and promptly you sang: 'Who did for every sinner die, hath surely died for me!' Such was the argument of your prevailing faith, such it remains, I trust, to this present hour. Had there been any exception in the terms of the Covenant of Grace, if there were any sinner for whom the Saviour's blood was not shed, that unhappy lot might have been your own. You see the logic of the case. I am obliged to accept the major premise, to admit the right of 'every sinner' to the world's atonement before I can assert my own, and from that admission we can never, with honour or consistency, draw back. I cannot be allowed to secure my personal salvation on terms that deny salvation to any of my sinful fellow men.

IV

HEREIN IS LOVE

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.—I JOHN iv. 10.

You remember the ancient question of the Book of Job: 'Where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding?' What a mighty problem is that, and what a world of answers it has evoked! All science and philosophy are man's toilsome attempt to meet this question, which is ever goading on the human mind to seek some foundation of certain truth beneath the deceptive shows and shifting surface of outward things, some rational solution of the confounding riddle of existence. This demand of the reason, this insatiate craving for truth, for system and order in the universe of things, is one of the grand distinctions of our nature, a witness to the soul's sonship with God.

But there is another question, no less urgent and crying, to put by the side of this, which springs from our heart as the demand for wisdom springs

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from our intelligence : ' Where shall sympathy be found, and where is the place of love and of compassion ? ' The heart craves affection, as the understanding craves knowledge ; and neither can be satisfied with partial and creaturely supplies. How vast and various are the capacities of the human heart ! The poetry of the race, the romantic flights of fancy, the endearments of home, the heroic achievements and sacrifices of patriotism and friendship, all testify to this deep hunger of our nature, that springs up afresh in every young and unspoilt heart. ' We live by admiration, hope, and love.' In depravity and folly many seek to slake that thirst at foul streams and poisonous springs ; or with painful toil they ' hew out for themselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water,' forsaking the one ' fountain of living waters.' But these very corruptions and aberrations, and miserable disappointments of the affections set on earthly things, show our capacity and our need for a higher attachment. At the bottom of all our restless cravings is the asking of the human heart for its Maker's love.

To answer the former question and neglect the latter, to meet Job's need and leave John's unregarded, is worse than useless. To increase our knowledge while we are poor and bankrupt in reverence and affection, is to increase our misery.

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This is the misfortune from which our age has suffered. A clear head and a cold heart, science without love and pity, an educated and cultured man without religion, there is no sadder condition than this, no combination more exquisitely calculated to breed wretchedness and mischief. The Pessimism and Nihilism which overshadow so much of the earnest thought of the day and imperil the very existence of European civilization are the product of this unhappy union, of growing enlightenment with a starved and shrunken faith.

Love, the love of God, is the world's lost treasure, lost and wanting everywhere in the age when St. John wrote. And the Apostle declares that he has found it; and here shouts his glad *Eureka*! The quest is ended; the secret is discovered; the pearl of great price is found at last, the thing 'for which if a man should give all the treasure of his house, it would be utterly despised,' a true, adequate, lasting, Divine affection for the empty heart of man. The disciples of Jesus have learnt it from their Master; they hold it in their heart, and for all their fellow men; and they cry out to us in this Book, and from the experience of all that have known God in Christ, 'Herein is love!' 'Behold what manner of love!'

That we may better understand where this great desideratum is, let us consider first *where it*

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is not. For this is John's method. He paints in black and white ; he describes by contrast. ' Herein is love,' he says, ' not that we have loved God.'

Is that statement true? Look into your own heart and say if the love of God is within you. If it is there, is it a natural growth? did it spring up freely and of its own accord?

We ought to have loved our Maker. He is infinitely adorable and lovable, and we were formed for nothing else. These hearts of ours with their profound passions and susceptibilities were fashioned for the love of the supreme God, of God our Father and Lord, as the organ for the musician's touch ; and there are depths within us unreached, notes unsounded, harmonious chords of music undreamed of, capacities unrealized, powers of thought and feeling unawakened and dead, and that must remain so, until His Spirit has breathed upon us and His love is shed abroad in our hearts and the hand of the mighty Master sweeps across the yielding keys. Man, you do not know yourself, if you have not tasted that the Lord is gracious ! It is the first and fundamental law of our being that we should ' love the Lord our God with heart and mind and soul and strength ' ; and we have not done it. Is there any other explanation needed for our discontent, for the dishonouring of our nature, for the hollowness of our joys, for the fears and languors

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of our heart? The first condition of health and peace is wanting to us, the primary law of our nature is broken and disregarded; we have not the love of God in us, and therefore everything is amiss with us and out of joint.

And it is not, strictly speaking, for want of capacity, of the power to love the Holy One, our Maker. You have loved His creatures, of whose worth and beauty He is the fountain: a noble, upright father, a tender, gracious mother; the home and scenes of childhood; your friends; your country; your many and honourable pursuits: the lovely forms of nature, and fair works of human art. 'Lo, these are a part of His ways!' All that delights you in them is a faint reflexion of His goodness and His beauty. Will you not look up from the image to the source, to the Sun of righteousness? Even for lower creatures, a cat or a dog about the house, a man will have kindly feeling, reciprocal affection, while he sends up no grateful or reverent thought to the great God who made us in His image! And those dumb creatures reprove us as they worship us and wait on our looks, while we are heedless of our Maker's bounty. 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Sin makes us even more stupid, more graceless than the brute beasts.

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Does not St. John speak to the past experience of all of us here, to the present condition of some, when he says: 'Not that we loved God.' The source of the love displayed in Jesus Christ is not in hearts like ours—selfish, vain, impure, insincere. Human nature has never generated out of itself anything like the gospel of this Book. If there is love between our Maker and ourselves, it was on His side that it began. He makes the overtures of mercy: He holds out the hand of peace. His goodness leads us to repentance: His ambassadors beseech us to be reconciled. Love is His to offer, His to bestow: ours only to accept.

Love, then, the love that speaks in the gospel, that dwells in the breast of the child of God and works blessing in so many Christian lives, is *from God*, from the bosom of the Father.

We spoke at the beginning of love as being a necessity for ourselves, as the life of our human heart. That is but one half the truth. It is a necessity for God. It is God's own nature. For John dares to say, and it is one of the most daring and inspired things ever said, 'God is love!' And love must bless and save. 'He cannot deny Himself.' What is the gospel but God's love rending the veil, bowing its heavens to come down? Long time had that hidden love of God refrained itself, now it must speak; and Jesus comes and the

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cross is set up, and God is manifest in flesh, reconciling the world to Himself. At any cost of sacrifice, at any risk of rejection, of contumely, the heart of God must at last speak out of the unseen, must declare itself to men, and so speak that our selfish, pre-occupied, vitiated, senseless, guilty, fearful hearts may understand. Hence the mission of the Son of God, the incarnation and the atonement. In two great steps, traced in verses nine and ten of this chapter, the love of God in Jesus Christ marched to the conquest of our hearts. 'He sent His Son into the world, that we might live through Him'; and 'He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' The first step is from the throne of heaven to the manger in Bethlehem, the second step from Bethlehem to Calvary.

The incarnation was not enough to save us; the life, the moral teaching, the human brotherhood of Jesus would never by itself have saved us. God is righteousness as well as mercy, and man has a conscience to be cleansed from dead works as well as a heart to be touched with new affections. 'Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death,' and that law which yokes death to sin is embedded in the frame of the conscience and has its ground in the will and being of God Himself. He that will redeem us must die the victim of our sin. There must be expiation, propitiation by our Representative;

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or we are lost. Love is not lawless. God will not violate His own justice or tamper with the constitution of His universe even to save His children. But He will Himself make the sacrifice, and the Son of His love shall be 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.'

It is the love of the Father, then, that John would have us thus think of, not only the love of Jesus in all this. And the Lord Jesus Himself was always insisting upon this and pointing us away from Himself to the Father: 'I came down from heaven,' He says, 'not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.' 'The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.' And on the cross the work was done. 'He redeemed us unto God *by His blood*.' For God does not love by halves; He does not undertake a great sacrifice, and leave it incomplete because it costs too much. His love can spare nothing that our salvation required, not even the blood of His own Son. It was by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge that the tragedy of Calvary came about. God the Almighty Father consented to and witnessed the death of His Son on our behalf. 'Herein is love.' To realize this love of God shown to us by the cross, we must think of the Father not merely as sending the Son beforehand on this mission, but as present, permitting, consenting while the dreadful scene went

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on. He heard when the Son of His love cried in His anguish, ' If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me ' ; and He did not take it away ! God the Father watched as His Son Jesus Christ was bound and led before His wicked judges, as He was buffeted and scourged and spat upon. He heard the sentence that condemned Him to death, the Holy One of God, and He did not ' cast forth His lightnings and scatter them, shoot forth His arrows and destroy them.' He saw Him stagger and faint beneath the weight of the cross ; saw Him stretched out with naked limbs, His innocent hands and feet nailed upon it ; He beheld Him, the Beloved One, who sat eternally at His right hand, hanging there for those long hours, tortured, mocked, abandoned, till there went up from His desolate heart the cry, ' My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ' —think of this, any of you that is a father—and still no hand reached out to help, nor even to wipe the death-sweat from His brow, till the Victim Himself could say, ' It is finished,' till the sacrifice was complete and He meekly breathed out His Spirit to the Father. What does it mean ? Has God forsaken Him ? Has He forgotten to be gracious to His Only Begotten, in whom He was ever well pleased, and has He in anger shut up from Him His tender mercies ? No, but He has other sons whom He must redeem ; and God would not

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save the Son of His love, until that Son had saved you and me ! Then, when the ransom-price was paid and the sacrifice complete and the bitter cup drained to its depths of shame and death, how quickly the Father raised Him up, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, crowning Him with new crowns and showing to Him new love and honour because of His great love to us. ' God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him for us all,' that He might ' with Him also freely give us all things.'

Does not ' God commend His love ' to you ? Will you accept the commendation ? Will you believe in the love which God hath toward you ? Will you respond to your Maker's affection thus shown to you ? Will you give your heart to God, or will you not ? It makes life a very solemn thing to be the object of such a regard as this in the mind of the Almighty, to be pursued by such a love, so faithful and yearning, to know that we have cost our Maker and Redeemer such a sacrifice. Does it not make the issues of our personal salvation or perdition real and serious beyond expression ? What must happen to us if we thwart and balk of its purpose the Divine affection that has thus tasked itself on our behalf, if we make the death of Jesus Christ for ourselves to be of none effect, and pass by His cross once more as if it were a thing of

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naught? Consider this, you that forget God: it is with such love that you are trifling; and upon the blood of God's Son you are trampling, if you continue any longer in sin.

Consider this, you that doubt His goodness, that find His Providence harsh and His compassions scant, or His grace inadequate to meet your need. Let your murmurs be silenced, let your misgivings and distrust be banished as you stand before the cross of Jesus, as you remember that 'by the grace of God He tasted death for every man.' God is love. Oh, restless, troubled heart, trust and be not afraid! Oh vain, wandering, rebellious heart submit, hear thy Father's voice and come home again!

V

HALLOWED BE THY NAME !

Hallowed be Thy Name.—MATT. vi. 9.

THE Lord's Prayer consists of two parts, the first concerning the rights of God, the second concerning the needs of men. And in this order. This is, in truth, the proper order of things. The Son of God, speaking to sons of God, could only teach us to pray 'after this manner,' in this order of petition. 'Seek ye first,' said Jesus, 'the kingdom of God and His righteousness,' everything else is a mere appendage to that. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and strength,' that is 'the first and great commandment ; the second is like unto it.' You are a son, and you have a father whom you revere and love ; now I know what touches you most. Let any man rob or insult your father, or meddle with his good name, and you are all aflame ; you can hardly keep your hands off that man ! So we can understand, in our little, passionate, human way, something of what Jesus

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felt in His grand, Divine, and perfect way about the honour and good name and just rights of the Heavenly Father in this world of ours ; ^{you} can understand something of the feelings in the breast of Jesus which lay behind the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer. ' Father, hallowed be Thy name ; Thy kingdom come ; Thy will be done ' : it is a supplication that God may have the loving reverence, the loyal obedience which are His due from the children of men, and that are so dear to Him. It is a supplication dictated by the filial spirit in Jesus, and one to which the childlike spirit in the human breast everywhere responds. Before ^{you} ask for ~~your daily~~ bread, before even ^{you} seek the pardon of ~~your~~ sins, first : ' Hallowed be Thy name ! '

Now the second part of the Lord's Prayer is built upon the first. Let God have His rights ; He will see to it that men have their needs. ~~Let the children~~ honour and obey their Father ; He will take care to cherish and protect them. A true worship is the best guarantee for a just social order ; the Brotherhood of men rests upon the Fatherhood of God. Let the spirit of man be set right, right at the centre and spring, in those deep roots and fibres by which, half-unconsciously to ourselves, the soul reaches out to the unseen, right in its fundamental relations to God, and other things, sooner or

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later, will right themselves. This first petition of our daily supplications lays in fact the corner-stone of human welfare ; and when God's name is truly hallowed throughout the earth, men and nations everywhere will be blest and happy.

Understanding therefore the supreme importance, the rightful primacy, of this first prayer that Jesus puts into our lips, let us ask ourselves two questions about it : first, what do we suppose it to mean ? secondly, how do we expect it to be fulfilled ?

What then, in the first place, do you and I really mean, what do we wish God to do, when we ask Him to see to it that His name is hallowed by all men ?

It is well that we should check ourselves sometimes when these sacred and familiar words pass our lips, lest we be found using ' vain repetitions as the heathen do,' the very thing against which our Lord warned us in dictating the prayer. You smile, perhaps, at superstition which counts it a merit to have muttered magic words so many times ; but I fear our worship is sometimes little better, when the Lord's Prayer is gabbled, as one sometimes hears it, or used as a mere finish and flourish to other prayers of our own, and when those who utter the words are not thinking in the least of what they say. What do we mean, what should we mean, when we breathe out to the great listening Father the entreaty, ' Hallowed be Thy name ' ?

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What is it that in our minds we wish and ask for ?

The bare etymological sense of the word is doubtless familiar : to ' hallow ' is to ' make holy,' to ' consecrate ' or ' sanctify.' But then, you think God's name is holy ; His name is the expression of His being, and that is holiness itself. — I can add nothing to, I can detract nothing from, His pure and eternal perfection. I cannot hurt Him, I cannot diminish His glory, by my withholding of worship, by my unbelief or blasphemy, any more than I could reach out a sooty finger and smirch the pure blue of the sky. The great God is infinitely above our disrespect, our petty insolence. Yes, so He is in His own absolute being. But see how He has humbled Himself, how He has bowed His heavens and come down. By the very fact of revelation, most of all by the incarnation, the Eternal has put Himself within our reach, put Himself (as one may say) within the mercy of our lips ; and the meanest man that lives has it within his power to insult His Maker. Just because God is condescending and has come so near to us, we have the power to commit outrage upon His name. And many do. There is no profanity like Christian profanity. There are those to whom the holy names of God and Christ serve no other purpose than that of a vile expletive, a vehicle for foul thoughts and hateful passions ; His awful name is

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something to curse by, that is the only use they have for it. There are others, in His sight it may be more guilty, for profanity is often ignorant and unthinking, who pay to His name the conventional tribute, the mock reverence of the bended knee and the feigned lips, with hearts cold to His love and persistently disobedient to His known will. Now we pray that all this may cease, profanity, hypocrisy, unbelief, that men may think of God and speak of God, and speak to God, everywhere with filial love and awe. O how much this means ; what a change in the world's temper it will bring about, when this prayer of the disciples of Jesus is truly answered !

[We can in some degree enter into our Lord's thoughts and purpose when He taught His disciples thus to pray. The thing that distressed and hurt Him most, that He saw to be at the bottom of the misery and mischief of the world, was human ignorance of God. ' O righteous Father,' He cried in sorrow ; ' the world hath not known Thee.' He turned round sharply once on the Jews, His own people, to whom God had revealed Himself above all others, and He said to them terrible words : ' You say that He is your God, and you have not known Him ! ' So it was within the pale of Israel, while beyond its borders were the great masses of the Heathen, of whom He was often thinking—He

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refers to them in the context of this prayer—possessed, as He knew, by all sorts of base and shameful ideas of the Divine nature. This ignorance of God, this estrangement from God, was the unspeakable grief of the heart of Jesus. His mission was to remove it, to 'show us the Father,' and restore us to the Father's love. For this purpose Jesus lived and died; He unites us with Himself in this mission when He puts this prayer within our lips.

There were two things most adverse to the petition in the mind of our Lord, two things that He meant His disciples to pray against in using it: these were Jewish unbelief and heathen idolatry; and the two chief obstacles are to-day, *Christian unbelief* and *Heathen idolatry*. These are the things that meet the eyes of our Heavenly Father, as He looks down on the earth seeking His true worshippers.

Let me speak of the latter of these two contradictions to our Lord's prayer. Most of us take some interest in missions to the Heathen and make some effort for their maintenance. But I am not sure that our zeal springs always from the deepest motives, from the spirit that breathed in the Lord's Prayer. There is a sentimental and romantic interest in Foreign Missions, fed by thrilling narratives and lively descriptions of strange

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lands and peoples. This sentiment may be sincere while it lasts, but it is not deep and will not by itself sustain the great cause. There is a philanthropic interest, awakened by pity for the misery and degradation of our fellow men, a longing to convey to the Pagan world the blessings of Christian enlightenment and freedom ; such motives cannot be too strong and active in our lives. But this is not the deepest motive, not the vital and commanding principle of our missionary work. We have thought and felt much, never too much, about the needs of men, but we have thought and felt far too little about the rights of our Father God, in the carrying on of our world mission. / Hence the want of a solemn, resolute purpose in this tremendous business ; hence the fluctuation and too frequent cooling and abatement of our missionary zeal.

To think that in this world of ours and beneath the heavens that shine with His glory, the homage and thanksgiving which belong to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ are paid by countless millions of our race to all sorts of false and cruel and filthy deities, that stocks and stones and idols usurp His rights and intercept the tribute of Love and praise that is due from all men to Him alone ! Idolatry is, in fact, an enormous, consummate, continual affront and insult, offered in ignorance,

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it may be, but none the less an affront offered daily by mankind to Almighty God, our Father. As I stood in Benares, at the centre of Hinduism, where, I suppose, idol-worship is concentrated as nowhere else in the world, the horror and shame of it all came upon me ; the sense of the infamy, the disgrace and ruin brought upon humanity by the perversion of the religious instincts, was brought home to me, in a way that I can but feebly convey to you. You know how the Old Testament saints felt about idolatry, the grief and indignation with which the scenes of heathen worship filled them, as they saw the Most High dishonoured, dishallowed in His own world by the setting up of heathen altars. Now, we know much more of God than they ; we have a far more tender and intimate revelation of the Divine character than was conveyed to them ; and we know, or at least we may know if we care about the matter, more than they did about the extent and the effects of heathenism amongst mankind ; our distress and indignation should be correspondingly more intense and more passionate than theirs. But how cold and unconcerned our hearts often are in regard to the glory of God and the hallowing of His name ! Yet we are His sons and daughters, and call Him daily, ' Our Father ! ']

[The time will come for this apathy to be shaken

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off, the time when Christian men will wake up to the monstrous nature of the world's ungodliness, when they will be unable to rest in their beds for thinking of it, unable to enjoy their quiet Sabbath worship for thinking of the horrors of idolatry. The time must come when we shall no longer play at Foreign Missions, but the Church will be ready to pour out blood and treasure for the winning of God's kingdom, and to send out her sons by whole regiments, as a great nation does when empire and honour are at stake.

Already Christendom possesses means and resources enough to put an end to heathenism within a measurable time, if she cared to do so. The idols will be abolished when the Church of Christ has resolved that they shall be, when she has learned to pray with full meaning and downright purpose :

'Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come !'
We are asking, when we thus pray, that all profanity, that all unbelief, that all idolatry shall cease amongst men, that mankind shall everywhere bear themselves towards God with filial reverence and awe.

VI

THIS MINISTRY

Seeing we have this ministry.—2 COR. iv. 1.

WHEN the Apostle Paul, in writing to the Corinthians of the sorrows and joys of his vocation, speaks of himself as 'having *this ministry*,' his words touch deep chords in our own hearts. It is 'this ministry,' the same unique religious calling, in which we present here are engaged, the ministry of God's good news to men concerning His Son, the ministry of the new covenant of life in Christ. The Christian ministry has been marred in its history by many faults and errors, but it has continued in unbroken succession from the apostles' age to our own; it is, beyond comparison, the most venerable and influential order that exists amongst mankind, and has conferred incalculable benefits on our race. And we count ourselves to-day, however unworthy, amongst its members; its duties and its powers have devolved upon us.

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Now the Apostle Paul was the first, after his Master, to realize the full scope and possibilities of the Christian ministry. It is largely upon his view of its nature and functions that our own is founded, and from his sentiments respecting it, his evangelic ardour, his passionate devotion to Christ and the cross, his enthusiasm for humanity, his vision of the glory of God, that our flagging faith and hope must again and again be quickened and re-kindled. What was 'this ministry' to the Apostle Paul? What may it be, what should it be, to us who share it with him? These are the questions which I invite you to ponder with myself this morning.

The view we take of our calling goes far to determine our efficiency in it. As our thoughts about preaching, about the care of souls, about the glory of the gospel, and the reality of eternal things are high or low, vivid or faded, constant or fitful, in the same measure our sense of responsibility, our diligence, our hopefulness and courage, the zest and energy pervading every part of our work will rise or will decline. As was wisely said in our Leeds Synod the other week : ' We ministers often think too highly of ourselves ; we never think highly enough of our office.' Of course there are different ways of thinking highly of it : there is the sacerdotal way of thinking, which dwells on and magnifies

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that in it which distinguishes it from that of other Christian men—that way of thinking is foreign to us; and there is the proper ministerial way of thinking highly of the ministry, which is to think highly of the truth in which we minister and of the souls to whom we minister. It is not difficult to seize some at least of the thoughts that were in St. Paul's mind when he wrote, with such peculiar emphasis and feeling, at the beginning of the fourth chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians of having 'this ministry,' this *treasure* as he calls it a little lower down.

And first I will note that this ministry is the *ministry of changed, transfigured men*.

Moses, he has observed, came down from the presence of God on Sinai at the law-giving with a supernal light on his face, a fading glory which he was compelled to veil so that its passing should not be seen. 'But we,' he says, 'with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord the Spirit.' There is nothing to the personal disparagement of Moses here implied. The wonderful, yet most natural, incident of his shining face, the glow which subsided into the colours of ordinary life, was symbolic of the outward and transitory, yet truly Divine, splendours of the religious system that he established.

This Ministry

That was a glory on the face, transfiguring the countenance ; this a glory on the soul, transfiguring the man : the one skin-deep, as you may say, the other heart-deep. That glory waned in lustre ; this glory abides and waxes with the course of time as life grows, as knowledge widens, and character deepens, and the soul becomes more capacious of God. That glory came from the Lord who revealed Himself in the letter of command engraved on stone ; this from the Lord who rules by His Spirit, and writes the new covenant on the fleshy tablets of the heart.

The instruments of this ministry are therefore men of spiritualized, transfigured, illuminated nature. In their own person resides the glory and evidence of the truth they are called to teach. They are not moons, coldly reflecting distant light, nor torch-holders bearing a flame external to themselves : they are suns, sending forth a radiance kindled in the heat of their own breast, they are torches, flaming with a light born in their own thought and feeling, and spending and consuming themselves in its production, a light which is nothing but their own souls aflame with Christ. To change the figure, is not this what Jesus meant when, speaking of the Spirit which His servants should receive, He cried, ' He that believeth on me, out of his belly there shall flow rivers of living water ;

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the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life'?

This was a true confession of the Apostle's experience as a minister of Christ; and his readers, we have no doubt, endorsed its truth. St. Paul was not a man reflecting on his brow a glory caught in some rare hour of high communion; nor as one who lifts in his hand a light to guide men through the dark ways of life. He was 'light in the Lord,' his whole personality was luminous and lustrous, transmuted into the element in which it wrought. The glory of the Divine love and righteousness burned in his spirit. The gospel possessed and saturated his intellect and affections. His will and energy were blended and identified with the loving will of God. 'I live no longer,' he cries; 'it is Christ that lives in me, and unified with Him, I live to God.' 'It pleased God to reveal His Son,' not to me so much as 'in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.' The whole gospel poured itself, as in sudden flood, upon his heart and swept through the man. His conversion and his mission were thus determined at a stroke. Jesus Christ stormed in one glorious assault the citadel of Saul's heart, enlisted its rebel powers, and turned its engines round against His foes. 'Ye are our epistle,' says Paul to the Corinthians, a proof of his apostleship; and similarly Paul was

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God's epistle to the heathen world, the transformed, Christ-possessed man, and his words or writings spoke as a part of himself, as the life of Christ in Paul vocalized.

In the next place we observe that this ministry is the ministry of *men who are absorbed in contemplating Christ.*

'Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord Lord we are transformed. . . . Beholding with unveiled face.' We note by the way that the Jewish veil has been meanwhile transferred from the face of Moses to the heart of the people, and that is natural enough. Like priest, like people. A hardness gathers over the heart, a film over the eyes, of those to whom a dull, defective, fading gospel is preached.

True gospel ministers are such as have learnt to look for themselves on the face of Christ Jesus the Lord. They have opened their hearts without reserve to His influence, and hold up their souls unshrinkingly to the light of God that searches, pierces, confounds us ere it irradiates. They walk in the light ; they gaze on the Redeemer's countenance ; they study and ponder Christ, till they are steeped in His effulgence, wrapped in His glory. There is no veil on their faces when they go up to the mount, or when they go down to the multitude. They look to Christ with reverent confidence ;

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they search the Scriptures with fearless intelligence ; they meet all truth with an open eye and a frank, large-hearted faith. But they bend and concentrate their energies on this one thing, ' to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.'

This endeavour, as the whole shaping of the Apostle's work indicates, is not merely an initial but a continued, incessant pursuit, and this pursuit is the secret, the only possible source of continued freshness and power in the gospel ministry. Whatever revival of theological thought and preaching power there is at the present time in the British Churches, is due to the fact that Christian men are thinking more directly and intently than they did some time ago about Christ Himself, Christ Jesus the Lord. Let any one of us cease to be a student of Christ, a child-scholar in His school, an eager searcher after His unsearchable riches, let any one of us begin to think that he knoweth anything as he ought to know, that he has mastered theology, that he is a competent and sufficiently equipped preacher of Christ—it is all over with him. From that moment his power declines ; the sap and savour of his ministry is gone. He settles into a dull, mechanical preacher, whose fluency or finish of style, whose noise and manner of action, only make him the more insufferable. He has come

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down from the mount ; he has ceased to contemplate the Divine mirror ; the glory fades from his ministrations, and no veil that he can find, no wit or versatility, no attention to popular topics of the day, will for long hide its fading from the people's eyes. He has ceased to study Christ, to gaze at Him with the eyes of the heart. He studies still, criticism, literature, connexional policy, perhaps, and finance ; but Christ is no longer the sun in his mental horizon. His eye and heart have ceased to follow the Master's as they once did. The inner transformation stops, that continual assimilation to Christ, from which, as from some chemical process, the light of his ministry was born. Dullness, mental sloth, spiritual impotence settle over him. He becomes a perfunctory minister of Christ, a lay figure in the pulpit.

Further, this ministry is the ministry of *men who shine in the image of God.*

By contemplating Christ, we are 'changed into the same image.' What image? The image that Christ Himself wore ; and we are told directly afterwards that Christ is 'the image of God.' It was 'God's glory' that shone into Paul's heart in that 'face of Christ.'

We often talk of following Christ, and remind ourselves and others He hath left us an example. And this is true and vitally important. But it is

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only half the truth. Christ never allows our thoughts to terminate with Himself. 'Ye shall be perfect,' He says, 'as your Father also in heaven is perfect,' 'the glory which Thou gavest Me,' He says to the Father, 'I have given them.' So the Apostle bids us, 'Be imitators of God as beloved children.' 'It was *God* that shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Christ.' The light of the eternal love, truth, holiness shines from Jesus Christ in His words, deeds, Person; but that which we profess to have and to show to men, is in truth nothing less, nothing lower than the splendour and majesty of the Most High God, the light of His knowledge. Now there is a way of preaching Christ in which all this is very much wanting and forgotten. Christ is sometimes regarded less as the way than as the end, and men are not brought to the Father through Him. Such Christianity deifies Christ, as it were, at the expense of God, and so stultifies itself; it does not lead us through the veil of His flesh into the holiest of all, but keeps us outside in curious or sentimental or moralizing admiration of the veil. In such preaching, orthodox, evangelical in form and theory as it may be, there is sometimes less seriousness and reverence, less real religion, than in earnest Judaism or Unitarianism. And Unitarianism has its cause in the forgetfulness of God that

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is thus sometimes seen in evangelical places of worship. If we do not carry with us the sense of the Divine presence, and make men feel how dreadful is the place of Christian prayer, if the Divine glory as we set it forth does not excite thoughts of deep awe and wonder, is it really that very glory that we ourselves behold, or is it some dim reflexion of it, some fanciful and partial Christ that we have fashioned for ourselves out of His fullness?

And, what is more, if this transformation after Christ's pattern is going on in us, then the very features of the Godhead will become visible in our character, the constancy, the grace, the wisdom, the very holiness of God will put their stamp upon us, and there will shine

Through all this earthly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

Ministers of Christ must be godly, godlike men, or they are impostors.

Let me indicate one point more in Paul's description and practice of 'this ministry.' It was a *ministry of truthful appeal to the living conscience of men.* 'Not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but in manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men in the sight of God.' My father gave me this text as a motto when I first began to

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preach ; and I have known no man more fearlessly true to it than he was.

Through the sincerity of his own heart, through his intimate acquaintance with Christ, the Christian minister has learnt to look profoundly into the hearts of others. As there is nothing dishonest in his behaviour and intention, so there is nothing equivocal in his methods, nothing affected or theatrical, no diplomatic craft, no cloak of flattery, Jesuitical reserve or economy of truth.

He knows that the truth has a witness to itself and a secret ally in every man's conscience, that there is somewhere, in most men at least, however buried under the waste and wreck of sin, a bottom ground, a bedrock on which the foundation of the new life may be laid, a vulnerable point at which the sword of the Spirit will pierce the armour of pride and unbelief, if he have but skill to reach it. And he is therefore a student of men only less than he is a student of Christ, of living men, and of all classes and sorts of men. He must know how to catch them in God's net : how to command respect, how to win and hold attention, how to shake the conscience, how to fire the heart and to capture the will for God. He will commend himself by his character and teaching. But in doing so he will be thinking only of commending his message and his Master ; and whatever men see in him

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will be so shown that they will glorify the Father in heaven, that they shall be brought by his means down to their knees before God, and by his means lifted into the light of God's reconciling love.

I am speaking to men who know these things as well as I do myself, who practise them, I trust, far better. But the subject is one on which a minister cannot help speaking to ministers, when opportunity occurs. The influences that drag us down, that belittle, that deteriorate our ministry, that tend to make it mechanical, superficial, dull or flippant, worldly, irreligious, thin, are as constant and overpowering as gravitation. There is no escape from this but in looking away to Jesus, bathing ourselves, as with the dew of the morning light, each day anew in the brightness of the Father's glory that streams from Him, and resting our hearts each night fully upon His peace which passes understanding, which is as the bosom of God, where deep things are spoken in silence to the hushed and quiet soul. They that wait upon Jehovah shall renew their strength. They that deny themselves shall win Christ and be found in Him, and find in Him for their fellows unsearchable riches, the very fullness of God.

VII

THE PARABLE OF THE LAMPS

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.---
MATT. XXV. 1-13.

THE parables delivered during the closing days of our Lord's earthly ministry stand by themselves ; they are parables of leave-taking, parables of the last judgement. He takes His disciples up to the mountains of vision, and points them far beyond the narrow gulf of death lying at His feet, on to the future ages of His kingdom and to the final destinies of men.'

Through all the sayings and stories of these last days there runs the thought, very consoling to Jesus Himself, of *His own certain and glorious return* to earth. He had come strangely to love this earth of ours, the home of His humanity, ill though we treated Him. He is the bridegroom, absent for a while, but coming before long to claim His affianced bride ; the king's son, who is going up to the royal court to receive the crown that

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is due to Him, thence to return in triumph with rewards and honour in His hands.

Now if we are loyal disciples, true lovers of our Lord, we shall share in these anticipations. And yet, I fear, this prospect has small place in the thoughts of many of us. How often, may I ask, do you think distinctly in the course of the week, nay in the course of the year, of the coming of our Lord?

It is certain that the subject does not enter into the experience of the Church of the day, into the thoughts and aims of ordinary Christian people, to anything like the extent to which it influenced the New Testament Church. With many it has faded into the distance; they hold it as part of their formal creed, but it is no part of their living and working faith; they turn away from the subject as from something quite mysterious and unpractical, on which it is hardly worth their while to spend a serious thought. Not a few indeed, and some professed theologians are of the number, dismiss the whole question by resolving the promises of Jesus and the hopes of the apostles into symbols and pictures of the spiritual triumphs of Christ's kingdom under the present course of things.

At the same time, in certain quarters, there is great activity of mind upon this matter, and a strained and almost feverish expectation. It is

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not for us to meddle with the times and seasons ; Jesus has told us that this is not our business. Bold calculations and extravagant prophecies excite, naturally enough, a reaction in sober minds, and tend to aggravate the popular indifference. Neither state of mind is satisfactory. ' Blessed are they that love his appearing ! ' Alas, for those who fear it ! And alas, still more, for those who neither love nor fear it ! For how shall they prepare to meet their God ?

The two parables of this chapter, the Parable of the Ten Virgins (or, as I prefer to call it, the Parable of the Lamps) and the Parable of the Talents, teach us many things about the disciple's service to his absent Lord. They set our duty before us in two opposite and complimentary aspects : it is a service of *watching* and of *working*. The maidens, furnished with their lighted lamps, are set to wait and look out through the darkness for the uncertain hour of the Bridegroom's coming ; the bondmen, endowed with their various talents, are sent out to trade on His behalf in the world's busy mart, that His resources may be increased and His house adorned with its befitting wealth. *Heedlessness* is condemned in the defaulters of the former class ; *indolence* in those of the second.

It is worth observing, as an instance of the fine

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propriety which marks our Lord's illustrations, that the duties of watching and working are assigned, in the imagery of the stories, to the women servants and the men servants of His kingdom respectively. It was suitable to the secluded life of women in the East that the more quiet and reflective part should be referred to them, but the reference has an intrinsic fitness. Not that these two duties are to be separated : every Christian worker should be a watcher, and every watcher, so far as possible, an active worker in the service ; nor do I wish to draw any hard-and-fast line between the offices of women and of men in the Church of Christ. Yet it was surely in the mind of Christ, as it seems to lie in the nature of things, that the main stress of these two functions should be thus distributed and relative excellencies in them thus determined.

Now as to the parable of the Lamps two questions arise, the answer to which should give us the gist and main teaching of our Lord's story, the pith of the parable. First, what is the lamp held in the Christian watcher's hand ? Secondly, what is the oil with which that lamp is fed ?

For the meaning of the lighted lamp we turn to the moral which our Lord draws at the end of His story : ' Watch therefore, because ye know not the day, nor the hour.' The lamp is surely *the instrument of watching*. It is that faculty belonging

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to us, the right or ill use of which makes us good or bad watchers in the Church of Christ. This presumption is made clearer when we recall our Lord's use of the figure in another place, where He says: 'The light of the body is the eye. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' The lamp of which Christ was thinking is the light that is in us, the eye of the heart, the window of the soul, through which light streams into it and through which it looks out upon the world. It is the individual conscience that He means; and this especially as the power of moral observation, of spiritual outlook and attention. It is, in a word, heedfulness, a thoughtful, watchful interest in His affairs, that Christ requires from us all. In the exercise of this power lies a great part of the service that the heavenly Master looks for from His disciples, almost the only service possible for some. What is needed is not cleverness or culture, the possession of the few, but a deeper power which belongs to us all in a measure capable of indefinite increase by exercise. Christ wants the use of our minds; and He will get little out of us to any purpose, unless that is yielded to Him first of all. He wants us

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to think for Him, as a mother thinks and plans for her children's well-being ; to watch for Him, as a merchant watches the markets, or a sailor the signs of sea and sky.

You may have little strength or means for public activity, little or nothing of the ability that improves the outside world. But you have an intelligent mind, you have a feeling heart : you can think, you can read ; you can notice and observe ; you can follow with eye and heart the progress of Christ's cause around you, and in the great field of the world. You can at least watch if you cannot work, you can ' watch and pray ! ' And if we only knew, that is half the battle ! The strength and fidelity of Christ's public servants, the courage of His soldiers on the battlefield, depend more than we can tell on the support of the unseen but potent host of sympathetic watchers, who ' strive together with ' them in their prayers to God for them, and who watch and pray the more because they are able to work the less. You see that old man on the hill-top, watching the conflict that rages in the valley : he does not strike a blow, he utters no cry, but the tide of Israel's battle against Amalek ebbs or flows as Moses' hands, stretched out to God in prayer, droop or rise again in supplication. This quality of sympathetic observation, ' the thoughtful love, through constant

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watching wise,' is an excellence conspicuous in true Christian womanhood. Jesus had seen it in His mother Mary, of whom it is said, commenting on the events of His childhood: 'Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.' The springs of all the deepest things are there, in these pondering mother-hearts; and we owe to her, I cannot doubt, the first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel, the story of the infancy and childhood of our Lord, the priceless record which the Evangelist drew, directly or indirectly, from the hidden reservoir of Mary's heart. So with Mary of Bethany, she who had 'chosen,' as we are told, 'the good part, that should not be taken from her.' We are not told of any active service rendered by her to the cause of Christ, only that she 'sat at Jesus' feet and heard His words.' That was an easy and delightful task, but you cannot do a better service to a great teacher than to listen to Him so; who can tell how much Jesus was helped (humanly speaking) by such listeners as Mary was? So when the occasion came, she was ready to do the right and beautiful thing. She had read the mind of the Master more deeply than any of His apostles at the time; she had listened and watched, and understood. And when she poured her treasured box of ointment on His feet, thinking of His burial, and they censured her, He commended the act and

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its purpose ; and the whole house of the Church to this day is filled with the odour of the ointment !

Such an one I remember meeting in one of our Churches many years ago. My host took me out on the Sunday afternoon to see, as he said, ' the most influential person in our Society.' He brought me to the chamber of an invalid lady, who had been on her couch for twenty-five years, a helpless sufferer. I knew at once what my friend meant when I saw the spiritual light burning in that woman's face. She bore the Church in her heart before God night and day. Every one there knew her and felt the influence of her prayers ; and they sought her counsel and her intercession with God in all their troubles. She lived a life of pain and weakness, but full of blessing and of holy power. We have many such amongst our people, and we might have many more, if God's appointed watchers knew their calling and the wondrous service within their reach. No great blessing comes to any Church, no day of visitation, without such watchers looking out for it, often in solitude, in sickness and obscurity, whose lamps burn steadily through dark and weary hours, eyes of patient desire that watch for the Lord ' more than they that watch for the morning.' The lamp is the symbol of a patient, observant, and expectant mind toward Christ.

But our second question remains : what is the

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oil with which the lamps of God are lighted and are fed? I think the disciples would have little difficulty in answering this question, and the parable on this point interpreted itself to them. Oil had become in the Old Testament a standing emblem of the anointing of men by God's grace in the *Holy Spirit*; and Jesus had taught them to think of the indwelling Spirit of God as God's chief and indispensable gift to men and the source of all abiding good in them. This was set forth in Zechariah's vision of the golden candlesticks (*or* candelabrum) in the sanctuary. There it stood lighting the Holy Place, its seven lamps supplied each of them by a separate pipe communicating with a central bowl that was placed in the midst of the lamps and above them, and filled with pure olive oil; and the oracle is given: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord!' That constant tide of living unction infused through every conduit of the many-branched lamp of the sanctuary was a true picture of the grace of God the Holy Spirit, as He pours His influence through the frame of the Church in every place, reaching by a private and particular channel the heart of each believing Christian man, that grace incessantly renewed as it is spent. That special grace with which we are now concerned, the gift of heedfulness and observation, the power

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to watch and pray, comes from this only source. It is as 'the Spirit of truth' that Christ commends His Father's gift to us, saying: 'He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said unto you'; 'He will show you the way into all the truth.' Yes, the Holy Spirit of Christ and of the Father is the educator of mankind; He is the teacher of the heart. He it is who fills the souls of Christians with love for their absent Lord, with longing for His presence and zeal for His kingdom.

On the other hand, the folly of the foolish maidens, what is it but the heedlessness, the superficiality, the improvidence of Christian believers who do not feel their dependence on the Holy Spirit and seek His continual aid? Our past religious experience may be a peril to us; the Methodist doctrine of conversion and conscious pardon is sometimes turned into a snare. When one has received great blessing from God, when his heart has been signally touched by Divine grace and a new and shining light kindled in his soul, is he not in danger of resting in this experience, of building too much on the initial grace of his conversion? As though the lamp of the soul were self-sustaining, as though there were some self-generated reservoir of grace, some spring of sacred oil within our spirit and when the light of God were once kindled in us

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it would shine on without tending or replenishment, and no further provision for the night watches were required ! We are prone to live upon our old attainments, upon the love of our espousals to the Lord, until that grace is spent and that love becomes a mere sentimental memory. So the man falls asleep in sin and self-complacency, until a shock disturbs him, a sudden bereavement, the loss of health or fortune, a searching trial such as God in His mercy sends to us each in turn, and the man wakes up startled, bewildered, to find his religion failing him, his faith giving way under him like a hollow and a rotten thing, when he comes to lean his soul's weight upon it ; he wakes up to see his lamp flickering and dying out when the power of darkness comes upon him. Such a crisis is as Christ's midnight cry, happy in its issue or dreadful as it finds us ready or unready, with lamps burning or extinguished. Swiftly the occasion passes, the procession sweeps by : the wise and faithful watchers enter with their Lord to the marriage feast ; and the unready, the slack and careless, those ' of the ungirt loin and unlit lamp,' come at last belated, to find a closed door and the friendliest of all voices saying : ' I know you not ! '

Have not occasions in the case of some of us so passed already that might cause us ' gnashing of teeth ' to think of ? ' Because,' said Jesus, ' thou

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knewest not the time of thy visitation !' Is the great opportunity, the day of salvation, the opportunity of knowing God and making peace with Him through Christ, so passing with any of ourselves ? Opportunities, once gone, never return without loss and diminution. The old man's wasted youth will never be his to spend again, let him wail and groan over it as he may ; and the dying man's misspent years will not be restored to him, his life is a sealed book, only to be opened at Christ's judgement-seat. He may be saved, oh yes, saved at the eleventh hour, at the last gasp ; that is just possible : but who would wish to be saved like that, rushing scared and scorched into the eternal world with ' the wood and hay and stubble,' the labour of a vain worldly life, in flames about him, himself barely escaping, ' saved as through fire ' ? We cannot trifle indefinitely with God and with our own souls ; we cannot play fast and loose with religion for ever and expect a second probation to make up for the wilful abuse of the first. ' When once the Master has risen up and shut to the door ' : oh how my soul has trembled at those words of Christ ! Do you expect to get in after that ? Who gave you the right to such presumption ? ' They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut ' ; and the unready, the fools and triflers, were shut out.

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I am speaking to many who in early days have set out for the kingdom of heaven. I beseech you to begin as those who mean to endure to the end, seriously, resolutely, prayerfully, 'so that ye may attain.' Don't play with religion. It is not a hobby, a sentimental fad; it is your life, your eternal life, the end and the glory of your being. Do not trust in your own heart, in your warm feelings, and strong convictions, and youthful enthusiasms; there must be something deeper in you than all that. These of themselves will not carry you far in the way to heaven; they may evaporate like the early dew under the heat of life's midday. But trust habitually, implicitly, infinitely in the Holy Spirit of God, pledged to you by Christ's word and secured by your humble and constant prayer. Let Him be your strength, the guide of your path, the counsellor of your thoughts, the spring of all your deeper feeling and aims.

If you have put your hand to Christ's plough, then you must never look back; but keep your hand on the tiller and your eye true to the mark, and plough a straight and clean furrow across the field of life. And yours will be the immortal joy and wealth of the harvest!

VIII

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one ; to each according to his several ability : and he went on his journey,—
MATT. XXV. 14-30.

How differently the same things appear to faith and to sight ! To the eye of a practical man of the world there never was such a failure as the career of Jesus Christ, measured by His powers and by His pretensions. He had come to save His people from their sins ; He claimed to be the Son of God, the light and life of the whole world. But there has been no national acceptance of Him, no popular success. He is 'despised and rejected of men' ; He is about to die the most shameful of deaths, condemned as a malefactor and blasphemer. His departure is, in the world's estimate, as when a man has made a great attempt and claimed a lofty crown, to be driven out with scorn and infamy. So the world thought and said. But *He* says of His departure : 'It is as when a man, leaving home

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for another country, calls his own servants, and delivers unto them his goods.' What astonishing words are these, spoken at such a juncture, uttered by a Galilean peasant expecting a malefactor's death ! He leaves this world as its conscious proprietor, as the princely heir going up to the royal court to receive the crown that is due to him, thence to return in joy and triumph. And all this is said calmly and quietly as a matter of course. Nay, more, before the chapter finishes, Jesus sees Himself in prophetic vision seated on the throne of the Almighty Judge, with all the nations passing in procession before Him, as sheep or goats under the Shepherd's dividing hand !

Which was right, the world or Jesus, sight or faith, in regard to His person, His kingdom, and His cross ? Let history answer : ever since these words were spoken Jesus Christ has been steadily, majestically, ascending to the throne of universal dominion over the hearts and minds of men. Already His name is above every name upon this earth, and He is the acknowledged King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus Christ is the Master in this house. We meet under His authority ; we invoke His presence ; we seek His mediation with God ; we humbly accept His blessing of forgiveness and grace ; we yield ourselves to His will ; we acknowledge Him

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to be the Lord. But are we doing this in sober reality? Is this what our presence verily means? Do you personally, and in the sight of God, take Him as your Master and put yourself, your powers and your life, at His disposal? For this is true religion, this and nothing else, to have 'a Master in heaven.' There are two men sitting side by side : the one is conscious day by day of unseen hands about his life, guiding, restraining, upholding him, shaping him for wise ends beyond his knowledge ; the other man has no such consciousness, and lives only to serve the world and to please himself. The first is the religious man, the true Christian ; the second, whatever name he bears, whatever place he holds within the Church, is nothing of the kind, and it is in vain that he calls Jesus ' Lord.' Now the parable before us rests on this assumption. It is a story about a Master and His servants. It speaks to those who acknowledge Jesus to be Lord, and who are His pledged and loyal servants.

The parable seems to have three things to say to the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ : it speaks about the goods entrusted to them ; about the method on which these goods are distributed ; and about the principle upon which our use of them will be judged at the last.

The goods committed to us by the Lord of life for use during the term of our stewardship, are

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spoken of as 'talents.' Now this does not signify our abilities, as does the common use of the word 'talents' to-day, for the Lord distinguishes the two ; He speaks of 'giving to every man according to his several ability.' The 'talent' is one thing, the 'ability,' or power to use it, is another. Our 'talents,' in Christ's use of the figure here, are our *opportunities*, our *means* in life, our outfit or capital, the material on which we exert our abilities and through which we bring them into exercise.

For instance, God has given to you, through your parents, sound limbs and senses, a healthy *physical frame*. What an asset is that, what a splendid foundation for a good and manful life's work ! The human body is the most wonderful and exquisite of God's material works. It is a case of the most delicate and perfect instruments ; it is an armoury of weapons with which to fight the battles of righteousness ; it is built to be the temple of the Holy Ghost. Respect your own bodily person and hold it sacred, and the person of every other like your own. Take care of your body, more than you would of the most costly machinery in your workshop ; keep it in good order and control. Keep it physically and morally clean. If you should do otherwise, if by your restlessness and self-indulgence you should dishonour and tamper with your body, and so spoil yourself for the best

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work and the happiest relations of life, there will be a stern reckoning for this at the day of judgement.

Then there is the talent of *education*, of which we are all more or less participants in these fortunate days. I suppose God has never bestowed on any generation of His children a greater boon in this respect than He is giving to many of you boys and girls to-day. Do you know, you young people, what your education has cost? Ages of toil, agonies of thought. Ever since men began to labour and to think, the noblest and best of our forefathers have struggled and spent themselves to break the bondage that held the race to a brute life and to win the knowledge that comes to you freely as the light of common day. Will you not prize your education, and turn it to the best account, for the service of God and of your kind?

Then there is the talent of *money*. It is in this form, indeed that the parable runs: the talent was a sum amounting to two hundred and forty pounds or so of our currency in weight of gold, and perhaps to two or three times as much as this in money value; so that 'one talent' was quite a substantial capital, and the poorest of the Lord's servants had enough with which to carry on a considerable business, had he chosen to do so. Moneyed wealth is a most responsible stewardship, a great peril and severe test to its possessor. None

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of us need envy rich men, if what Jesus said be true: 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!' What is there that so blinds the eyes and so enervates the moral nature as gold in its misuse; 'the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.' And yet what a blessing and a power for good, in the hands of a wise and generous man! Rich men and capitalists are reservoirs of material good, stored up for the service of mankind; they are God's bankers, on whom He may draw as often and as largely as He will. No man is safe with money who does not understand that he holds it as his Lord's steward, who does not ask each day: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do with this wealth of Thine?' No man will make a right and faithful use of money who does not remember and prepare for the audit of the judgment day.

There are those who have little enough of money, but who possess other gifts more rare and precious, *social powers and talents* that are too seldom put to their highest use. That face of beauty, that voice of melody, that sprightly wit, that quick fancy and touch of poetry in your nature, who gave it? And if God gave it, shall it not shine to the Giver's glory? It is for you to adorn the Saviour's doctrine, to make religion pleasant and winning, as we dull preachers cannot! You, whom God

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has gifted with social charm and refinement, with the graces that beautify and cheer human existence, may dispense God's richest alms. You may carry gladness to sick homes and weary struggling hearts. You may set the music which lightens for your fellows the dull and heavy march of life. 'When thou makest a feast,' said Jesus, when you want to have a concert or a garden-party or a picnic, 'don't invite your rich neighbours,' who are stalled of such things, 'but the poor, the halt, the blind,'—those whose lives are starved of wholesome pleasure—'and great shall be your reward in heaven.'

Let these examples suffice. What our Lord means to say is that all our faculties and resources in life, material, intellectual, social, or spiritual, are God's property in us; they are Christ's wealth invested in us and lodged with us upon trust, and the heavenly Master expects to have His interest and profit out of every one of them, out of every talent of every kind that He has committed to the richest or to the poorest of us alike.

The parable intimates that *the goods of our heavenly Master are not scattered at random and as accidents of nature, but dealt out on a wise and provident plan*: 'To every man,' says Jesus, 'according to his several ability.' Now, we must confess that this is hard to believe; here 'we walk by faith, not by

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sight.' Life seems to be full of misfits and maladjustments as between ability and opportunity. This is one of the standing trials of religion, the strong temptation to distrust God's Providence. We are foolish servants, judging the wise Master's work, and seeing but the smallest part of a vast and unfinished plan. Only give me a chance, says many a young man who is wasting his time and trifling with his work, give me a fair field for my powers, and see what I will do ! So, I dare say, the poor fellow of the parable assured himself : ' If I had the five talents of that favourite of my Lord, no better a man than myself, or the modest two talents of my other fellow servant, I could have driven a fine trade with such a sum ; but this wretched one talent, what is it for a man of my ability ? A mere mockery, I can make nothing of it ! ' Men think too highly of their abilities and too meanly of their opportunities ; they waste time that should be spent in improving what they have, in childish fretting for what God has denied them. If I have but one talent, let me be thankful for what I have, thankful that God created me a man and not a beast ; let me in God's name cheerfully make the most of it ; and it will soon be multiplied. Men struggle and scramble and trample one another down to get a position, to get hold of another talent, a larger opportunity ; and they

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think little about the sort of man that will be forthcoming to fill that position when it is secured. Imagine an artist who should spend all his strength and skill upon the pedestal, on the mere position, and had nothing but a shapeless block, instead of a finished statue, to put upon that pedestal when it was achieved, an advertisement of his folly and incompetence ! May no young man here mismanage the business of life like that ! Take care of yourself, of your own heart, and mind, and health, and character ; make yourself as worthy and capable a man as you can, and trust the great Father God who made you, to take care of your position and to find the pedestal on which to place you if you are worth setting high amongst your fellows. ' No man lights a candle, and puts it under a bushel.' God is wiser than that ; if He is kindling a great light in some young soul here, He will find the lampstand on which to set it, if the light only shines to His glory. ' Ye are the light of the world,' said Jesus ; and His disciples must have smiled when they heard it : ' We the light of the world, obscure peasants of Galilee ; what should the world know of us ? ' But their souls were kindled with the Master's love, and He has found the candlestick on which to put them ; to-day the nations are walking in their light as they shine from the lampstand of the pages of this Book !

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If your career should be cut short, and you should never come to your own in this world, well, the universe is wide and eternity is long. We have cost our Master too much for Him to care to waste a single ounce of ability that He has lodged in the nature of any one of us. Christ's word will vindicate itself to patient faith, and it shall be, sooner or later, 'To every man according to his several ability.'

'After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and seeketh a reckoning with them': He comes late, and He is away so long that many of His servants forget Him, and forget that they are servants; but He comes surely, and He comes to judge every man's work, of what sort it is.

The principle on which the Lord will act at the last judgement is clear from this parable. It lies in the sentence, identically repeated, of verses twenty-one and twenty-three. Here are two men very differently endowed and situated, the man of five talents and the man of two, one of high station, the other from the middle ranks of life, but they have done equally well in proportion to their opportunity; their reward is equal. This signifies that God's estimate of our life's service is based, not on the amount of work accomplished, but *on the proportion the output bears to our strength and our opportunities*. The Master of life does not

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expect to reap where He has not sown and to gather where He has not strewn ; but He does expect to gather and to reap from us each in proportion to His bestowments. If the poor man with his one talent had been able to say, honestly and manfully, at the end : ‘ Lord, Thou deliveredst unto me one talent, no more, but I have gained one other talent beside it ! By Thy grace, I have done my best and have made the most of the little I had,’ depend upon it the great Judge would have received him with just as gracious a smile, and would have pronounced the ‘ Well done ’ with just as full an emphasis as in the case of the most distinguished and successful of his fellows.

This is fair play : this is heaven’s justice redressing earth’s inequalities. We cannot be equal here, equally strong or clever or rich or fortunate, but we can be equally faithful and loyal and diligent in every station, and equally honoured and approved by God. ‘ There are many first,’ said Jesus, ‘ who will be last, and the last first,’ when the final reckoning comes. As to the number of our talents, the station we hold in society, that matters comparatively little ; everything depends on the spirit and conscience in which our work is done. Heaven looks down with impartial eyes on our social distinctions ; God’s Son was a cottager and a working carpenter. Whether it be the work of the parlour

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or the kitchen, of the grimed and sweating labourer at the forge or of the comfortable and dignified employer in the office, of the great captains of Israel, whose names stand emblazoned on the roll of the Church's history, or of the humble forgotten men of the rank and file whose dust lies in a nameless grave, it is all one to the eternal Judge. Jesus Christ is no respecter of persons ; but He is a keen judge—no scamped work in any of life's workshops will pass His eye—He is a keen judge and a great admirer and generous rewarder of honest and thorough work in every field of service.

Our Master does not pay by the piece. He has been at the bench ; He knows what work means, and how the task that is child's play to one man draws the life-blood of another. He knows what amount of real toil, what conscience, what honour and faith, what vital energy each of us puts into our work in life, and He pays for that. We honour those to whom God has entrusted great abilities and opportunities, and especially those whom He has honoured with the respect and confidence of their fellow citizens. We wish them happiness in the discharge of their high duties, the goodwill of men, the favour and guidance of God, and the ' Well done ' of Jesus Christ at the last. Much depends for us all upon the worthiness and fidelity of our magistrates and councillors, our men of rank and

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office. We must remind them in God's house that they have a stewardship, of which they must some day render a strict account ; that the highest and humblest of us alike will appear at the judgement-seat of Jesus Christ. His ' Well done ' is the crown of every loyal ambition, is the passport to eternal happiness. To whom be all honour, majesty, might, and dominion, now, henceforth, and for ever. Amen.

IX

ST. PAUL'S INSPIRATION

But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory ; which none of the rulers of this world knoweth : for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory ; but as it is written,

*Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not,
And which entered not into the heart of man,
Whatsoever things God prepared for those that love Him.*

But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit ; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him ? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth ; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him ; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.—I COR. ii. 7-14.

THERE is in the First Epistle to the Corinthians a striking and powerful passage in which the Apostle Paul discloses more fully than anywhere else his consciousness of Divine inspiration. This glimpse into the apostolic self-consciousness, this account of the supernatural prompting and guidance under which St. Paul spoke and wrote, is deeply interesting in itself, and of great importance to us who accept

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his teaching as the truth of God. And if it be, as he believed, the same Spirit which wrought throughout Scripture and has produced the whole Christian revelation, and if there be any uniformity in the action of the Holy Spirit in His operation on the minds of inspired men, what this apostle tells us about himself must apply to his fellow teachers ; indeed it is not of himself alone that he speaks, as though his experience were unique and isolated ; but he writes of this matter in the first person plural, claiming to share with all ' Christ's holy apostles and prophets ' in the aid which had been promised to them as the witnesses and exponents of His truth to mankind.

It is necessary to consider the whole of the passage to which I refer, and which forms my text, in order to take in the scope of the apostle's contention, and the bearing of the high claim that he makes. He is before his critics at Corinth. His teaching is disparaged, his authority is slighted by his own children in the faith. And though this may be a small matter to himself personally, and the opinion of the Corinthians about him in comparison with the judgement of Christ is as nothing, still he is bound for their sake, and for the sake of the interests he represents, to assert himself and vindicate his apostolic character. The disparagement from which the apostle suffered in the Corinthian Church, as

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compared with Apollos and other Christian teachers, bore upon the matter and the form of his doctrine. He had dwelt mainly on the bare elementary facts of the gospel message, and he had set these forth in a plain, matter-of-fact, unadorned style. The philosophy and the eloquence which later preachers supplied, appeared to be both wanting in him; and philosophy and rhetoric were what suited the Corinthian taste, and were a passport to popularity. Now the apostle explains that he has deliberately adopted the style that his critics despise, for two reasons: (1) it suited his message. The Cross of Christ and the great facts of redemption must first speak for themselves and assert their intrinsic power, and from this high-flown eloquence on his part would only have detracted. (2) It suited the infantile state of the Corinthians, who were not fit for deeper theological disquisition, which might have pleased and flattered them, but would not have fed their souls. Such strong meat instead of milk, such deeper wisdom for full-grown men, will be forthcoming, when and so far as they are ready for it. Their childish conduct shows how far they fall short at present of this condition.

You see that the Apostle's matter and style are both under criticism, his thought and his language. And it is important to observe that *he claims inspiration for both*. He declares that he has taught

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the right things in the right way ; that his ideas and his language bear the same impress of the Spirit of God upon them. This is most definitely, almost defiantly, asserted in verse thirteen : ' which things of God we speak . . . in words Spirit-taught combining spiritual things with spiritual,' that is to say (for I do not think that, when closely looked at, this last phrase admits of doubt as to its interpretation), making words and thoughts match each other, so that all is of one piece, all spiritual and of God.

Now this bears very closely and practically on our conception of the word of God in Scripture. I read the other day that ' Nobody now believes in verbal inspiration.' St. Paul at any rate believed in it for himself. We are familiar with the distinction between *verbal* and *dynamical* inspiration ; and no doubt the distinction intended is a real and valuable one. But in view of a passage like this, it does not seem to be very happily expressed. Certainly it is false to Scripture itself, and is in flat contradiction to the Apostle's experience, if it is to mean that certain abstract thoughts were infused into the minds of inspired men, which they were left to put into words as best they might unaided, so that they got the gist of their message and no more from the Holy Ghost, or that He was with them in their musings and meditations, but left them

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alone when they opened their mouths or took pen in hand. Perhaps few of those who deny verbal inspiration mean so much as this, but this is the direction in which the distinction looks and the issue to which it is apt to come, leaving each interpreter free to set aside the actual words of inspired men and to construe for himself the Divine thought and true revelation that he conceives to lie behind them. I need not show what arbitrary and conflicting results such a theory leads to, and how uncertain a guide Scripture becomes when read in this way.

This antithesis between the verbal and dynamical, understood as I have intimated, is artificial in itself. It is, so to speak, psychologically, philosophically impossible. It traverses the relation of word and thought in the human mind, their organic oneness. They are identified more closely than body and soul; the one is the expression, the indispensable form and physiognomy of the other. The style is nothing accidental and adventitious: 'the style is the man,' and more completely so as the man is the more sincere and thorough. In the speech, in the book, the man prints himself, and whatsoever works in his mind pours itself forth in his utterance and comes out in the features of his spoken, as in his written, work. This identity of word and thought seemingly characterized the

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Apostle Paul, as it did his Master whose title is 'the Word of God,' a name which precisely signifies thought concrete in speech, and who declared 'the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' We shall hardly save the doctrine of inspiration by sacrificing the *words* of Scripture, as though they were a mere human product, the outward shell of the truth, which could be detached leaving the kernel uninjured and secure.

So much as to the form which Paul's inspiration took. He defines its *subject matter*, on the one side negatively, 'things which eye saw not and ear heard not and no human heart conceived'; on the other side positively, 'all that God prepared for them that love him'; or again, 'the things of God,' the things 'of grace bestowed on us,' 'the deep things of God,' 'the mystery of God, which is Christ,' the 'hidden wisdom' unknown to those who 'crucified the Lord of glory,' in a word, all that we include in the gospel, or that discloses the mind and disposition of God Himself and the way of man's salvation through Christ. This is what the inspiring Spirit is concerned about. Everything else in the apostolic testimony, in the knowledge and use of Scripture, is accessory and incidental, is subordinate to this supreme and all-controlling interest. St. Paul is not a teacher of philosophy, or a lecturer in ancient history, and the Bible is

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not a manual of science or a gallery of biographical portraits ; it is not written to teach things that we may learn by natural sense and reason, but just the things which these can never reach, the things of God, which His Spirit brings up from the dread depths of the Divine, pouring them into the hearts of the chosen witnesses of Christ His Son. These are the things that the Apostle claims to 'know' ; on these he sets himself up, in all humility, as an authority. At the same time the knowledge of these spiritual facts, about God and salvation, involves knowledge, exact and full for all practical and saving purposes, of certain facts of human life and history, the resurrection of Jesus above all ; which were involved in the revealed knowledge of God and formed a part of God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. And that reference to the crucifying of the Lord of glory shows where, in St. Paul's estimation, the very centre lies in the subject matter of inspiration, the burning point at which the revelation of all the ages is focused, the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul glories in that only ; he knows about that, if he knows nothing else, and is prepared to defy even an angel from heaven who should contradict him upon this subject. In his preaching of the Cross the very wisdom and power of God Himself are gathered up and find their sure expression.

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From this centre and point of view everything in Scripture must be estimated. There are things of the centre and things of the circumference, things of the letter and of the Spirit, weightier and weightiest matters, and matters that are the small dust of the balance, essentials and circumstantialia, vitals of the heart and core of revelation and mere points of form and outward dress and mode, the eternal substance of Divine truth and the details determined by the sundry times and diverse manners of its presentment. It is here, I suppose, that the distinction really runs which is intended by the contrast between the verbal and dynamical in Scripture, or between the human and Divine, the heavenly treasure and the earthly vessel, in revelation. How to apply it may be a question requiring the greatest wisdom and the finest spiritual perception ; but that it does exist and that St. Paul gives us here the clue to its application, is evident to us.

Now there is a third consideration of great moment in this passage. The inspiring Spirit has to do not only with the communication of the gospel, alike in respect of matter and form, but also with its *reception*. Paul's message consists of spiritual things, conveyed in spiritual words, and to spiritual men. 'The natural man,' he says 'receiveth not the things of God ; they are foolishness to him,

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because they are spiritually discerned.' 'No man can say that Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Ghost.' Herod Agrippa, an intelligent Jew but also a polished man of the world, pronounces Paul a crazy enthusiast, a scholar whose brain had been turned by poring over books. There must be an understanding between the eye and the light, the chords of the ear and the chords of the instrument must be in tune with each other. To the unspiritual, unawakened 'natural man' the gospel of Paul is like a glorious landscape spread before the blind, like heavenliest music falling on ears that are stone-deaf. The man has no feeling for it, no sensibility to which it can appeal. The authority of the gospel, the inspiration of the Bible cannot therefore verify themselves to everybody. A man must be, in a sense, inspired to recognize inspiration, as he must be musical to hear music. No wonder that the Jews stumbled at the Cross, and the Greeks laughed at it; and no wonder that irreligious people flout the Bible and scoff at our evangelical doctrine. They have plenty of excuses for doing so at the present day, as they had in the Apostle's time, if they are so minded.

Here are two men side by side, say yourself and another, such a young man as you may meet with almost anywhere, both active-minded and critical. Both are sensible, perhaps in an equal degree, of

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the objections that can be brought against the Bible, of the difficulties attaching to the old-fashioned faith, the offence and the foolishness of the Cross in our modern times. Both are sensitive and open-eyed in that direction. But you see the other side of the account, which your companion does not. You trace in these pages the action and thought of the living God, disclosures of His redeeming love toward men ; these are to you patent, overwhelming, self-evidencing facts, in comparison with which the difficulties and ' offences ' of the Bible, supposing them to be ever so real, count as nothing. In Scripture, in the gospel, you find food for the hungry, medicine for the heart's sickness, salvation for the lost, life for the dead ; and if there are other things beside, matter which you cannot understand or cannot assimilate, its existence does not in the least invalidate the existence and the worth of the grand verities of God which redeem and bless you and satisfy your heart in its deepest needs. But all this is ' spiritually discerned.' While ' the natural man ' is still in such immense force, scepticism and denial must still be rife. For those who will ' stumble at the word, being disobedient,' the word has its stumbling-blocks now as in the first days. And you may have to share the grief of the Apostle over a gospel hid to them that are perishing. If so, see that you share it with the same grieved and

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sorrowful heart, and that it be with weeping, not with hard and fierce hostility, that you speak of the enemies of the Cross of Christ. And oh beware lest in you the hindrance should be found ; lest in your unfaithfulness, your want of knowledge or want of zeal or lack of sympathy a stumbling-block should be set up, over which men may fall to their spiritual ruin. If only the spiritual man can *receive*, it is equally true that only the spiritual man can *communicate* the things of the Spirit of God.

X

THE JOY OF JESUS

These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled.—JOHN XV. II.

WE speak of the Lord Jesus as ‘the man of sorrows’; it is one of His many crowns. But He is also the Lord of joy! Do you remember what He said once in defending His disciples for not fasting when others did? It was in those early joyous days of His ministry in Galilee, when all seemed to go well with Him: ‘Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?’ As much as to say: ‘They cannot fast when they are with Me; they are so merry!’ The company of Jesus was like a continual wedding-feast, and His face was sunshine. And now at this farewell supper the like gladness breaks out in Him, when one least expects it. ‘Let not your heart be troubled,’ so His talk begins; ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,’ so it ends! He bends all His powers to cheer His fearful disciples, whose hearts are wrung at the thought

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of His departure ; and He speaks words that have breathed hope and courage into the hearts of sorrowful men ever since, that will serve for this end so long as sorrow and parting shall endure.

This exultant mood in Jesus on the eve of His passion is not altogether strange. Something like it is witnessed in most men framed for great struggles and sacrifices, at the approach of the critical hour. The poet Wordsworth describes this temper in his lines upon the character of the ' Happy Warrior ' : he depicts him as the man who,

If he be called upon to face
Some awful moment, to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad, for human kind,
Is happy as a lover, and attired
With sudden brightness like a man inspired.

The heart rises to the occasion. The very magnitude of the conflict brings an elevation and serenity of mood, a satisfaction in the decisiveness of the approaching hour, which mark the true hero. So it was with the Captain of our Salvation. ' I have a baptism to be baptized with,' He had said some months before, ' and how am I straitened till it be accomplished ' : that straitness is gone, for the great baptism is now upon Him. He marched to battle with no misgiving, no despondency. Never, so far as we can judge, had Jesus enjoyed on earth an hour of happiness so rich as that of the Last

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Supper, with the traitor once departed, though Gethsemane was impending : a perfect example of His own maxim, ' Be not anxious for the morrow ! ' So the prophetic word was fulfilled concerning God's Chosen : ' Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity. Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.' Our noblest joys often lie close to our darkest sorrows, even as the loftiest mountains border the abysses of the ocean.

It is worth while to inquire into the cause of the wonderful joy experienced by the Redeemer at this time, the more so because it is a communicative and infectious happiness. He invites His companions to share it ; He spoke of it for this very purpose, ' that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.' In trying to understand it, we need not search into the mysteries of His eternal being and His communion with the Father ; enough to trace out the indications plainly open to us, the disclosures He Himself makes of the ingredients of His communion-cup at this table. I name two or three of the manifest elements of the Saviour's happiness ; you will probably observe others which I have not thought of, or have no time to dwell upon.

I speak first of the *joy of achievement, of success in His life-work*, which our Lord realized at the

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hour of earthly parting. This feeling runs through the discourse and the prayer of the Upper Chamber. 'I have glorified Thee on the earth,' He declares to the Father; 'I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do. I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world. . . . The words which Thou gavest Me, I have given unto them; and they received them, and have known of a truth . . . that Thou didst send Me. . . . While I was with them, I kept them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; I guarded them, and not one of them is lost.' And now 'I come to Thee.' True, the task of the cross remained to be executed, but (judging by the tokens of the Last Supper) Jesus looked on this as virtually accomplished: He is so sure of it, and so completely anticipates the issue, that He can say, though the world is on the point of crushing Him, 'I have overcome the world!'

Listen then to the Good Shepherd telling the tale of His sheep at nightfall. Watch the dutiful Son as He turns His face homeward in the evening light, with the day's errand discharged, the day's task fulfilled. 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do; and now, O Father, I come to Thee!' O, what joy! It is Divine; it is exquisitely human. There is nothing holier, nothing happier, that we can aspire to in prospect of life's

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closing scene. We may tremble to think in what an imperfect broken sense we are likely to enter into this joy of our Lord at the last ; how much regret and grief may mingle with the rendering of our account ; and yet we hear an echo of this triumph from one who had been in his time ' a persecutor and injurer ' of the cause of Christ : ' I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith ; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.' Courage, good soldier of Christ Jesus ! Keep your hands clean, and your faith high and true ; and that crown shall be yours.

To the world's eye, for Jesus the crown was at that juncture the last thing to be anticipated. Never had there been such a failure as His career, considering His powers and the claims He made. No popular success, no national acceptance. Barabbas was nearer kingship ! Only those eleven obscure and humble men, and a few score outside more or less like them, to show for three years of Divine miracles and teaching ; but Jesus knew ! For in the eternal matters numbers do not count, appearances are nothing : character, faith, love, spiritual purpose, these are everything. Jesus knew that in this Upper Room He had the salt of the earth, the light of the whole world. He has spoken words which will outlast heaven and earth ; He

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has founded a Church against which the gates of death will never prevail ; He has fixed for His Cross a basis on which it will stand firm, that thus ' lifted up ' He may ' draw all men unto Him.' The foundations of God's kingdom have been well and truly laid. Jesus drank that night of the wine of success !

Another rich ingredient in our Lord's cup of happiness at the Last Supper we do well to appreciate. His was the *joy of love reciprocated, the bliss of a pure and imperishable friendship.* All the speech of Jesus in this communion hour was of love, like the talk of the bridegroom with the bride : seven times you will find the word repeated in this immediate context.

By the nature of the Saviour's grief you may judge where lay His delights. His crushing sorrow was desolation. ' Reproach,' He cried in one of His Psalmist forerunners, ' hath broken my heart.' From the cross He looked down on a sea of mocking faces ; He ' looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but He found none.' More than the thorns and the nails, those scornful looks and taunting words pierced and tortured the heart of love. Hated and accursed of men, He is compelled at last to cry, ' My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And the patient heart of Jesus broke. If such was the Saviour's grief, judge of

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the delight which the Son of man, the Love of God, felt in human affection and devotion ; to-night He *knows* the company of His friends to the very full.

The onlookers might say that these were a poor and sorry sort of friends for such a One as He. One of the Twelve has betrayed Him ; another, in the stress of temptation, will deny Him ; at the crisis they all ' forsook Him and fled.' Even at this table they renew their bickerings. Jesus understands all this, but it does not trouble Him now ; for He reads their hearts, and He knows that, despite their faults and their pettiness of mind, with the traitor gone the rest are wholly His ; they love and trust Him utterly, and Peter did not lie when he said, ' I am ready to go with Thee unto prison and unto death.' The dread trial over, they will be faithful unto death. Their love will save their faith.

So He does not chide them any more. The Eleven are His, to live and die for Him ; and they are enough to conquer the world with. He feasts Himself in the affection of these simple and loyal men. What proud and happy things He says of them in the evening's talk ! ' Here are they that have continued with Me in My trials, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed to Me.' ' I am the vine, you the branches ;

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abide in Me, and I in you. . . . Ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you. . . . The Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved Me and believed that I am sent from God. Henceforth I call you not servants, for . . . all things that I have received of My Father I have made known unto you.' Is there such a happiness as this, to have friends to whom you can give your whole heart, give yourself away? Our Lord is able now to impart the last secrets of His mission. To these chosen ones He entrusts truths about God and life and destiny hidden since the world's foundation. The communion the Lord held with the little company that shared His bread and cup, was the deepest and purest ever known on earth. Heaven looked down and saw itself mirrored in the fellowship of this feast as never before. These men, and the multitude who should hereafter believe in Him through their word, had been worth living for ; they were worth dying for. 'Greater love,' He said, 'hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends': and greater joy the Lover of men could not feel than to have such friends for whom to lay down life. From the cup held out to Him by the fond and reverent affection of His comrades, our blessed Lord drank now without stint. It was God's consolation to His heart, the sacramental *viaticum*, the feast of

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farewell that cheered Him as He stepped forth on His journey into the land of trouble and anguish.

But I think the largest factor in the joy of Jesus at the Last Supper is to be found in *His knowledge of God's good purposes toward men and in the part that belongs to Him in the furthering of those purposes.*

He came, the Son of God, from the Father's bosom, whither He is about to return ; He is acquainted as none other in the universe with God's inmost mind. He sees behind the shows of life ; He reads the secrets of Nature and of Providence. And Jesus knows that the Maker means well by His world, that the Almighty Father intends everlasting good for mankind. Despite contrary appearances, of which His approaching fate is the most gloomy and terrible, God has sent Him into the world to save and to bless, and His mission is succeeding just where and because it seems to fail ! So the Saviour is full of courage in this desperate hour ; He bids His friends ' be of good cheer,' for behind Him are the forces of Almighty love and faithfulness at work upon their vast design. Those who believe in Jesus Christ, who have cast in their lot with the Redeemer, have the right to taste His joy even in their saddest hours, the joy of a sure faith in the goodness of God, the certainty of the world's salvation and of the full

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vindication of righteousness and truth amongst men, the blessedness of sharing God's redeeming purpose toward our race. But the price of that joy is to pay: one must know the grief of the cross of Jesus, 'the fellowship of His sufferings.' The pessimism of our times is consequent upon the eclipse of faith in God's goodwill. There is a deep disquiet and discontent filling at the present time many intelligent minds and clouding many a life richly furnished with the means of natural happiness, a gnawing grief due to the lack of assurance respecting the being and the character of Almighty God, misery caused by distrust as to the moral foundations of life, as to the truth and love and sovereign will that are at the heart of the universe. To share the faith of Jesus, and to follow in the steps of His victory through sacrifice and suffering, is the one cure for our modern malady. If we really know the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, if we 'know the love that God hath toward us,' nothing will utterly cast us down. 'Hope thou in God,' we shall say to our soul when the earthly prospect is darkest, 'for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.'

We have turned over the pages of this old-world story of friendship sealed in the communion of the Last Supper. But it is a new story, that may

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be as fresh and wonderful for you as for any of the Twelve. The message of the verse offering Christ's joy to us to-day, is addressed to this assembly of the friends of Jesus, to every man and woman who cares to receive it. It is written down here for no other purpose. Being the same to-day as yesterday, He sets store to-day by human regard just as He did then. He is scanning this company even as He looked at the Twelve about the table, detecting the traitor and gathering into His breast the affection of all that truly love Him. How He prizes humble and diligent obedience ! How He loathes the lukewarm and scorns the self-seekers who throng His service when it is gainful, and who stamp their own glory on every deed done in His name !

There is a daring line in one of our hymns which says, ' We raise the happiness of heaven ! ' It is surely true. If ' there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over ' every ' sinner that repents,' surely there is joy over every saint that perseveres ! Our daily struggles are watched by interested and friendly eyes, looking out from the unseen : every victory over secret temptation, every repression of evil temper, every patient endurance of wrong, every act of genuine kindness, every brave word spoken for God and for truth, is recognized with joy in the heavenly places. The whole moral

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universe is richer for the life of every good man every day. 'I know thy works,' says the exalted Christ speaking to His Churches; 'I know where thou dwellest,' 'I know thy affliction and thy poverty!' Are you so living and working day by day that your heavenly Master can look down on you with satisfaction? Does He see that in your case He has not toiled and suffered in vain? Oh, I think if I could but personally add the faintest ripple to the great tide of joy that swells in the Redeemer's breast as He sees of the travail of His soul in the growing number and ripening character and widening service of His people through the earth, what a happiness would be mine!

We are deeply concerned in our Saviour's joy. He is concerned for ours. He provides for it by inviting us to share in His! He could not have shown us a greater honour, nor paid His disciples a finer compliment, than He has done in this sentence, 'that My joy may be in you, and that' so 'your joy may be full.' This is true comradeship, to have the same joys and sorrows. He expects that the same things will please us that pleased Him, that we shall find our delights where He found His, that His likes and dislikes, His tastes and sympathies, will also be ours. Judge your pleasures by this standard.

Depend upon it, this is the one direction in which

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pure and lasting happiness will be found by any of us, in sharing the ideas and life-purposes of Jesus, that is in true religion. Do you think money will make you happy, or what the ungodly world calls pleasure? Then you have a shallow heart and a sordid nature; a miserable disillusion is awaiting you, and I pray God it may come soon, that you may find out in time! You and I, if we know only a little of religion, know enough to spoil us for a life of sensual gratification and mercenary success. Going from such a home, the Prodigal Son was not likely to be happy among the harlots and the swine! The man was a fool of fools who thought to fill his immortal soul with the produce of full barns and the luxuries of a sumptuous table. God has provided better things than this for you and me, and He has fashioned our nature for the enjoyment of those better things.

No; our little cup of happiness is to be filled from those sources that fed the great communion-cup of Jesus. Work and friendship, duty and love, fellowship with the grand purposes of our Creator and Redeemer, the favour of God, and the service of man: these are the pure springs of soul-health and joy; the streams that flow from these evermore 'make glad the city of God.' They are springs of sorrow, as they were to our Redeemer, but of a sorrow which goes to yield a holier and deeper

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joy. And our joy will be consummated in that brighter realm, where 'tears shall be wiped' from all faces, and 'the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd and shall lead them to fountains of living water.'

XI

THE GOD OF THE RESURRECTION

Who through Him are believers in God, which raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory ; so that your faith and hope might be in God.—1 PET. i. 21.

THIS Epistle is the echo of a great transforming experience. St. Peter had been raised from despair to a boundless hope on Easter Day by the return of his dead Master from Joseph's grave : ' Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,' he breaks out in the first sentence, ' who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' This wonderful Easter renewal, experienced by the first disciples of Jesus, was the beginning of a spiritual renascence, a new birth of mankind, which already, during some forty years, had spread far and wide amongst the nations. The fact that God had ' raised up from the dead ' His Son Jesus slain by the sins of men, and had ' given Him glory ' instead of shame, changed the whole face of heaven and earth for those who believed it, and gave a

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new meaning to life, a new outlook and purpose to the world, a new reality to God in the eyes of men.

Think for a moment of the state of mind in which the death of Jesus left His Apostles. He had drawn them to Him as never man had drawn the souls of men before, they had become one with Him as branches with the vine, they had beheld God in Him, and had learnt through Him to call God Father. Their religious faith, no less than their human love, had come to be wrapped up in the Lord Jesus. And He is taken from them, by a death the most shameful that could be devised. The glory that shone on His face is utterly eclipsed ; the way to the Father they had found in Him comes to an abrupt end. Israel has condemned Him as a false Messiah ; and God to all appearance, has disowned His alleged Son upon the cross—did not Jesus confess so much in His dying words ? Imagine the effect of all this on the disciples of Jesus, particularly on the Apostle Peter, their leader. The arrest of his Master and His helpless appearance before the High Priest had so unmanned Peter that he had thrice denied Him ; and now horror is heaped on horror, despair added to despair. For those three days after the crucifixion Simon Peter was like a dead man, stunned and drowned in misery. Character and self-respect, faith in God and purpose in life, every hold-fast is gone ; the man is a wreck

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of his former self, with all the waves and billows sweeping over him. Put yourself by Simon Peter's side during those hours of remorse and anguish from Friday night to Sunday morning. Then imagine the reaction and revulsion of feeling, the revival of the spirit of this crushed and desperate man, that ensued on the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. 'He is risen! Go, tell His disciples, and Peter, He is risen from the dead!' The message brought by the women from the tomb was at first too good to be believed. But when its truth was verified, and the risen Lord 'appeared to Simon,' this indeed was life from the dead; it was as the sun rising in black midnight, hope born from the bosom of despair. One feels through all this letter, written in the Apostle's old age, the strange thrill and awe of shame, the wondering love, the bewildering joy, the passionate rebound of faith, with which Simon Peter first looked on the form of his risen Master. From that moment he was 'begotten again unto a living hope.'

Peter's faith in God had been shaken, and with this the very foundation of the man's being, by the death of Jesus; now his faith was established upon a new and imperishable basis. And what took place in Peter's breast was a world-experience. These far-off Gentile Christians of the five Provinces in Asia Minor, as this letter testifies, have been

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brought, with the Apostle who writes to them, through knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus Christ into a new religious life, into a new conception of God, a new faith and hope toward Him. Let us look at this aspect of Easter Day, and seek to realize with St. Peter what God has become to us through the resurrection of His Son, how the Divine character and relations to men are revealed by this sublime event.

The open grave of Jesus reveals God to mankind as *the living God*, at once *living and life-giving*.

Remember how Jesus identified Himself with God, claiming to be to Him as a Son to the Father, how He professed to speak superhuman words and to do deeds of mercy beyond human power or understanding by virtue of the Father's presence in Him: 'the living Father,' He cried, 'hath sent Me, and I live because of the Father.' 'I and the Father are one.' On the night before His death He repeated these tremendous assumptions in the strongest possible terms; He bade His disciples believe in Him as they believed in God; He said that those who had seen Him had 'seen the Father'; that the Father was in Him and He in the Father. Hence Peter's companion John, in one of his letters, sums all this up by saying that 'the life was manifested' in Jesus, 'the eternal life that was with the Father'; the innermost life of the universe

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was thus disclosed, and brought within human sight and touch, in the incarnate Son of God.

This being so, and Jesus standing in this filial relation to Almighty God, the attempt upon His life touched to the quick the being and honour of God Himself. The putting of Him to death was a crucial experiment on the Divine in Him, and marked the supreme crisis of revelation. Human sin, in lifting its hand against this Holy One of God, struck in blind malignity at the life of God incarnated, and would have emptied, if it could, the throne of the universe: 'they have both seen and hated,' said Jesus of the Jewish rulers, 'both Me and My Father.' 'Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed?' was the High Priest's interrogation; and when He replied in the affirmative, He was condemned to death for blasphemy. The issue was absolutely clear. However modern critics may stumble over the matter, the condemners of Jesus knew perfectly well what they meant. The Jews denied and defied the Divinity in Jesus. By putting Him to death, they challenged the power of God, which, as He declared, had sent Him and lodged itself within Him. To this effect they taunted Him as He hung on the cross: 'Let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him! He trusteth on God; let Him deliver Him now, if He desireth Him; for He said, I am the Son of God.'

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Now what will God say to this? Had there been no answer to the defiance, had Jesus succumbed to death like any other man and 'seen corruption in the grave,' what must have been the inference? Why, then this sentence of Caiaphas would have been vindicated and the unbelief of the Jews, to all appearance, justified. The previous miracles of the Saviour and the 'signs' of God's saving power at work in Him would have served only to emphasize the failure, since they had raised expectations so miserably disappointed; 'we had hoped,' said the two travellers to Emmaus, 'that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.' Suffering this blow to fall on the Son of His love in the face of the whole world, deserting Him in the hour of extremity, the God who sent Him is discredited, the light is gone out of the sky; wrong has triumphed over right, and hate has trampled down love; the throne of Satan is established for ever in the blood of Jesus, and 'the fool' who 'says in his heart: There is no God,' seems to be the wise man. Such were Peter's bitter thoughts during those dreadful hours. The death of his Master had killed for the time his faith in God. The life of God had been manifest in the man Jesus. He had staked His disciples' faith and hope in God, and virtually the world's faith, upon His single person. If that life could be suppressed by the sentence of Caiaphas

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and Pilate, dismissed by the shout of the mob, 'Away with Him !'—if it could be fastened by ropes and nails to a wooden cross and its extinction proved by a spear-thrust—if it could be shut up and securely sealed in Joseph's grave and its exit locked by a great stone—if it were possible for Jesus to be 'holden of death,' then it was all over with Him for purposes of human faith, and all over with the God who had spoken to men in Him. The mirror of the Divine held up to our eyes in Jesus Christ is shattered, the way to the Father and to heaven that He had opened, ends at the sepulchre ! So Peter for forty hours had sorrowfully thought ; and such must have been the verdict of the world had Good Friday proved the *finis* of the story of Jesus. Long ere this His name would have been forgotten. If God had not 'raised ' Jesus ' from the dead and given Him glory,' surely faith in Him must have died out of the world, as it would have died out of Simon Peter's heart. Life that does not react when you probe and experiment upon it, is pronounced extinct. A Divine Father who had nothing to say when His Son was ' slain and hanged on a tree ' must have been deposed from human reverence and trust. To men who disbelieve in the resurrection of Christ, who hold that miracles in the nature of things are impossible, God for the most part is not a living, personal God at all ;

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He is merely a name for the sum total of natural laws.

You may remember, perhaps, a poignant scene in Froude's account of Thomas Carlyle's last days. 'I once said to him before his death,' writes Carlyle's biographer, who was poor company, surely, for the sick and dying man, 'that I could believe in a God who *did* something. With a cry of pain I can never forget he said, "He does nothing!"' Well, He has done this at least, He has raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, and through faith in His name has wrought, and is working, ten thousand miracles of grace all over the earth, which such men will not see. These great and sad modern thinkers, these gifted doubters, declare in the name of science and reason that miracles are impossible, unbelievable, and yet when it comes to the pinch, they demand them! They meet the facts with an obstinate and incurable scepticism, and, like the Sadducees of Christ's own day, 'will not believe though one rise from the dead!' If we choose to pull down the blinds and shut out the Easter light, and say: 'There is no sun in the heavens, and no God in the world,' then we shall live in bitterness and die in gloom; and neither God nor man can comfort or help us. But God *has done* this glorious deed once for all. At the challenge of those who denied His Son Jesus Christ and put Him to death, He has

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raised Him from the dead with His mighty hand on the third day. By that act God has rekindled the world's extinguished light ; He has given to mankind a new faith and hope and revealed Himself in undreamed-of glory and power ; and through faith in the name of the risen Jesus He has raised millions of dead souls to walk in newness of life.

Further then, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ reveals God as the living God amongst men, it shows in Him also *the Redeeming God*. He ' raised Him up,' writes St. Peter to those once depraved and morally ruined heathen, ' so that your faith and hope might be in God.' They are ' begotten again to a living hope,' and with this to an ' undefiled inheritance,' to a life of moral health and holiness. So the entire course of this Epistle shows. In this ethical sense Easter Sunday vindicates Good Friday ; the resurrection of Jesus not only reverses the sentence of death passed upon him by the world, but makes good the purpose of His death. The new faith in God that sprang from the resurrection of Jesus is a regenerating force ; it supplies the motives and energies of a new spiritual life.

Glance for a moment at the sentences preceding our text. The Apostle has summoned his readers to put away the ' former lusts ' belonging to the times of their ' ignorance ' and to be ' holy in all manner of living.' As the children of a Holy Father,

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he tells them that they were 'redeemed' for this end from the 'vain manner of life handed down from' their 'fathers' by no price of 'silver and gold' but by Christ's 'precious blood,' who was appointed to this sacrifice 'before the foundation of the world.' But 'How shall I know this?' the Gentile might ask; 'why should I interpret the death of Jesus in this exalted sense? How am I to recognize in His crucifixion more than a hapless martyrdom, a self-immolation of the best and worthiest of men for the cause of righteousness, heroic and devoted if you like, but futile, like so many others? What is there to lift this death above other sacrifices of men who died for faith or country?'

This reasonable question St. Peter answers by saying: 'God raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory.' The purpose of the Redeemer's death is approved and satisfied. Jesus had declared that He was 'giving up His life a ransom for many,' that His 'blood' was to be 'shed for many, for the remission of sins;' and by raising Him from the grave and showing Him to mankind 'alive after His passion,' the Almighty Father declares the sacrifice accepted, the atoning death has fulfilled its purpose and has secured that forgiveness, that salvation from sin, for the sake of which Christ willingly submitted to it. Accordingly the Apostle Paul writes that He 'died because of our sins, and

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was raised up because of our justification.' Easter Sunday verifies and validates the great sacrifice of the Cross ; it announces the finished Atonement. It shows in what light the Almighty Father regards the Redeemer and His act of propitiation for mankind. From Joseph's grave Christ issues forth 'a Prince and Saviour to give to Israel,' and to the world, 'repentance and remission of sins.' Hence the charge that the risen Lord gave to His Apostles in the forty days of His tarrying with us : 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead on the third day ; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations.'

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to faith in Jesus, like the restoration of Simon Peter, was a signal evidence of the power of 'our Lord's resurrection.' Saul was a hater of the Nazarene, a remorseless persecutor of His followers. The crucifixion of Jesus, in Saul's eyes, proved Him to be a blasphemous pretender. His proud Jewish heart was filled with rage to think how this impostor had dragged the Messiahship into the dust. But when Jesus of Nazareth Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus, living and glorified, everything was changed for him. Saul's whole world of thought was revolutionized in 'the glory of that light.' At once he 'confessed with his mouth that Jesus

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is Lord, and believed in his heart that God had raised Him from the dead'; and he was saved, and went forth to 'preach the faith of which once he made havoc!' Imagine the death of the Saviour followed by no such rising, then Saul's first scornful interpretation of the Cross would have been justified; and the words of the sorrowing disciples on their way to Emmaus would have supplied a fit epitaph for the tomb of Jesus: 'We had hoped that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.'

But 'now is Christ risen from the dead,' and become the messenger of God's forgiveness to a guilty world, the pledge of a new life to every soul that 'is dead in trespasses and sins.' Does some unpardoned sinner read these words? Then let him at this moment claim forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit at the hands of His risen and living Saviour, and the life of the resurrection shall be his. 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved!'

This is our present salvation, and thus we begin to know 'the power of His resurrection.' But our 'faith and hope toward God,' thus warranted, have a much farther scope. There is, as St. Peter says, 'a salvation ready to be revealed in the last times'; we look for 'the resurrection of the dead

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and the life of the world to come.' For 'Christ is risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that are asleep.' 'The first-fruits'—it is the sample, the guarantee and the beginning of the full world-harvest. By the sweep and lift of the same Almighty Arm that raised His Son from the depths of the grave and 'seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places,' shall all the holy dead be raised up to be with Him for ever. 'Christ the first-fruits; afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming.' Let every Christian mourner dry his tears this day. Let every soul 'in bondage through fear of death' exult over the last enemy, and say 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' The spring flowers are coming up once more, to cover the graves of our sleeping beloved; and the sure hope of the resurrection blossoms again in our heart, to bear the fruit of joyous, strenuous service to God and man. For 'death is abolished,' nought that is good perishes, 'your labour is not in vain in the Lord,' since Jesus Christ is risen indeed, and by His resurrection 'your faith and hope' are fixed on God.

XII

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind ; which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach ; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away.—MATT. xiii. 47-48.

AMONG the parables recorded in this chapter Jesus exhibits the work of God's kingdom in widely differing aspects. The images of the Leaven (*verse 33*) and of the Drag-net (*verse 47 f.*) may almost be said to be opposed the one to the other in their teaching. We must put the two together if we are to realize the breadth and completeness of the mind of Christ, and the manifold ways and workings of His grace. The former depicts an inward, ~~silent~~, gradual, and almost insensible process ; the latter an exterior, demonstrative, sweeping, and concerted movement. The leaven operates from within outwards ; the net from without inwards. The one spreads and radiates from the centre ; the other gathers and concentrates from the circumference. Had Christianity been described by the emblem of

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the leaven alone, one might have conceived of it as being a kind of philosophy, spreading through society by the force of private conviction, by the mere contagion of example and private influence. Had the emblem of the net stood alone, we might have thought of God's kingdom as a visible organization, with its network of public institutions and agencies and its material appliances for reaching and winning the multitudes of men. The leaven does everything in detail and point by point ; the net does everything wholesale and in the mass. |

Either representation, taken by itself, is inadequate, true so far as it goes, but not the whole truth. It is necessary to look at these contrasts, that we may be saved from narrowness of mind in our thoughts about God's kingdom, from the jealousies and suspicions of those who are engaged in one kind of Christian work and see what is going on in a particular line and have no sympathy for those, as sincere and devoted as themselves, who do not use their methods, or serve in their particular regiment of the Christian army. Work is hindered, and prayer is impoverished and restrained, when we are thus straitened in ourselves. It is a part of our growth in grace to learn to appreciate good men of different tastes and ideas from ourselves, and to recognize the true work of the Lord done by those whose implements and training are as different from our

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own as those of the baker at the oven from those of the fisherman with his boats and nets.

I was struck with this contrast, and set upon preaching about these two parables, by what I saw in India, a country teeming with human life in its most diversified forms. I was particularly interested in the work of two men side by side in the Madras District, men who were close friends and fellow-labourers, honouring and helping each other's work to the utmost, yet differing in their temperament and powers and modes of operation almost as widely as Methodist missionaries can. I refer to Frederick W. Kellett, who came home soon after that to die, spent by excessive toil, and William Goudie, who is now serving the Church at home.¹ The former was a professor in the Christian College of Madras, teaching students, mostly Brahmans, of the most cultivated type in South India; the other, a pioneer vernacular missionary to the Pariahs of that country, amongst whom are to be found some of the most ignorant of human beings on the face of the earth. Both men were doing with great efficiency the same work of the Lord; the one thrusting the leaven deep into the Hindu intellect and conscience, with results far-reaching and momentous, but largely hidden; the other flinging the gospel net, like a strong fisher, amongst the

¹ Since this was written, William Goudie also has passed to the higher service.

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masses of the poor and ignorant, drawing them, sometimes by shoals, to Christ's boat. The work of the one man went to transform Hinduism from within, the other to undermine it from without. Who shall say which of these two was doing the greater service, or was most approved by the Master who qualified them both and sent them forth? Surely each had his own place and function in the common service; the work of each was necessary to complement that of his fellow, and we have no need and no right, as St. Paul put it, to be 'puffed up for the one against the other.' Let us look then at the lesson of the net, and see what it may teach us about the ways of God's kingdom and the work of His servants in the world.

'The kingdom of heaven,' Jesus said, 'is like unto a net cast into the sea and gathering up of every kind.' Here is a scene utterly different from that of the leaven-parable. Instead of the retirement of the house and the quiet of the fire-side, with the batch of bread standing there or shut away in the oven, you are out on the shore under the open sky, with the waves beating and the breeze rippling the waters, and the bustling men pushing out with oar and sail, and sending the great net plashing over the vessel's side when they reach the fishing-ground. Everything is stir, tumult, eagerness; the life of the out-of-doors world and the

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play of strenuous activity are all around you.

Observe that the net here signifies, not the small hand-net or casting-net elsewhere spoken of, but the large seine or drag-net used in catching fish that swim in shoals, the kind of net that makes a great haul, and that requires a large boat, and strong tackle, and a disciplined crew to manage it. Now this implies several things of importance about the work of Christ that have a particular bearing on our own times.

It implies, for one thing, that *Christ expected His disciples to aim at the masses*. His gospel does spread, as the other parable intimates, by reaching men one by one, through private intercourse and the force of personal example, and the diffusion of ideas and principles. But our Lord was not satisfied with this ; He ' beheld the multitude and was moved with compassion ' over their shepherdless state. He addressed the crowd as well as the individual ; He dealt with men wholesale, and adopted means calculated to touch the heart and strike the imagination of the people. He acted in His public teaching and in His works of healing and beneficence, like the Father who ' makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.' Jesus exercised a popular ministry, most effective for the purpose, alongside of His inner and intimate ministry to the

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chosen few. And His Church has the same double office, the same variety of resource and method for her various operations. There never was so great a need for popular Christian work on a large scale in our country, as there is to-day, because there never were such masses, such herds and aggregates of men crowded together, as are found in our modern cities. Men go in shoals, like the fish of this parable, good and bad mixed up together, as they have done in no previous age. When John Wesley began his work more than a century and a half ago, Englishmen were a rural people; the bulk of the population was scattered over the villages and country towns. But now the city masses, thronging the manufacturing centres, preponderate more and more over the dwellers in the fields. They must be cared for and captured for Christ. The great change in the habits and life of the people ~~I have referred to~~ calls for a corresponding change and adaptation in the methods of Christian work. The fishermen must follow the fish.

A second lesson of the parable is *the adaptation of means to the end pursued*. For the kind of fishing here described, a suitable net and proper equipment has to be provided. Here, ~~as I take it, is~~ a sanction for organized evangelism, for Missionary Societies, both for Home and Foreign work, with their special agents and skilled appliances and the employment

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of every kind of means calculated to reach and win the multitudes for Christ, in whatever region they are found. It has sometimes been questioned whether Jesus Christ ever contemplated the forming of a visible Church, with its ministry and discipline, with its machinery for administration and propagandism. All this is said by some to be quite foreign to His mind ; for He worked by purely spiritual means, His kingdom was not of this world, and He never contemplated elaborately organized Churches with their funds and committees and business, and multifarious agencies, such as we see to-day, and in Methodism more than in other Churches. If the parable of the leaven had stood by itself, this contention would have been plausible. But this emblem of the great drag-net gives quite a different idea of what He expected His Church to be like. The net is itself a piece of elaborate and carefully designed machinery. The boat and tackle, the practised and disciplined crew, working together under its captain, with each man standing in his place and following the word of command, make up a picture of skilful organization, of contrivance and co-operation, of the use of manifold means, direct and indirect, brought to bear successfully on a single end. The Lord Jesus believed in good management, in sound organization and suitable appliances, for all the purposes of His kingdom. And He expected,

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surely, that the means for these great ends would be forthcoming, that His people would not grudge the expense and trouble of fitting up the gospel boat, of weaving and plying the nets for His fishing upon a proper scale. The equipment and the manning of such a boat as we see in this parable required outlay and capital ; it was a large investment on the part of those concerned. The medical and social and educational work of our missions at home and abroad, the auxiliary means employed to further the gospel and save the multitudes, if rightly directed, will come within the scope of this parable, and belong to the tackle and outfit of Christ's fishing boat, sent forth to ply its art amongst the vast shoals of men floating through the seas in London or Bradford, in China or in India. If all this is costly and exacting in its demands on time and talent and material means, that is only what Christ has taught us, by word and example ; if the end is reached, and the masses are brought into the net, no expenditure of any kind can possibly be too great. What else does God give His people skill and wealth and opportunity for, but to lavish them on the work of His kingdom ! The miracles of Jesus were a net woven to catch the Galilean people and win their hearts for His teaching ; He organized the Twelve, and then the Seventy in turn, and sent them out with careful instructions for no other intent but to

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reach the people and to multiply the effect of His personal ministry amongst them. He has left us an example in this respect also. And He left His Church on earth fashioned for this purpose, that with it He might sweep the seas and oceans of human life and draw in the nations to the eternal shores, where He sits evermore exalted as Saviour and Judge of mankind.

It results, in the third place, from all that we have said, that *this parable is a picture of what every Church of Christ ought to be.*

Observe that Jesus Christ did not say, 'The kingdom of heaven *has* a net,' but 'it *is* like a net'; this is its proper constitution, what it is made for and used for. The Church itself—for Church and kingdom are substantially one—is Christ's great fishing-net, His machinery for catching men. And what the Church at large is, that every particular and smallest Church is bound to be, in its place and measure. The Church itself, the whole body of it, has this character, this responsibility, in Christ's view of it. It is not certain persons within the Church, missionaries, preachers, evangelists, orders of service, officials, guilds, or what not, that are set apart for this duty, taking it off the shoulders of the ordinary laymen and Church members; no, the net is to be made up of the whole membership, organized and co-operating for this purpose, and

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flung out bodily on occasion into the stream of the life around it.

The Church is often compared to a flock of sheep, with its fenced fold and its careful shepherds, its good pastures and still waters. That is a very delightful and comforting image of a well-tended Church ; but, taken by itself, it is very narrow and selfish. It is the notion with which too many Churches are content, nursing themselves in a smug and cosy respectability, catering well for their own interests and full of kindness and concern for each other, but hardly looking beyond the fence. This other image is quite as authoritative and important, and declares the mind of Jesus as to what He meant His Church to be in the world. The Church exists, according to Christ's purpose, to save men, to bring the world under His redeeming influence ; and every member of every Church must lend his help or be counted disloyal. Missionary service is not the calling of a few, of a Society within the Church, but of every follower of Christ.

One sees, in the light of this parable, how disunion and contention in every Church must be regarded. It means rupturing Christ's net ; every schism, every quarrel, every case in which Christian men will not work together, is virtually a rent, through which the fish escape that should have been enclosed and caught. Every man who holds aloof from

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service, who will not lend himself to the work of winning souls, makes another hole in Christ's net. The efficiency of the net depends on the soundness of the whole fibre, and on the skill and completeness with which all that fibre is woven together. Every particle of the Church's substance should go into the web, to make it as large and strong and closely meshed as it can possibly be. Is this Church 'like unto a net,' in such close communion and active co-operation, busily plied and sweeping the currents of life around it, drawing men in numbers to Christ and His salvation? Sometimes our Churches are the opposite of this: like a heap of ravelled twine, or of fragments, odds and ends, lying loosely here and there, never knitted up to any hearty fellowship or earnest purpose; or if the net exists, it is dragged here and there, by one strong influence or another, without counsel and direction in its leaders. All this thwarts the great design of our Master, and leaves the fish uncaught, the multitude outside our Churches, the boat with its divided crew and useless tackle sailing and sailing *over* them!

There is a shade of sadness about both the parables we have considered to-day, as there is attaching to all human work. It was a time of disappointment and comparative failure to Himself, the crisis of the Galilean ministry, when His earlier popularity had

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waned and His miracles had become familiar, when opposition and persecution was gathering force as the multitude forsook Him, and He said sadly to His disciples, ' Will ye also go away ? ' Much of the seed He had sown had fallen on the wayside to be trodden down, or in shallow or thorn-choked soil ; the enemy had sown tares amongst His wheat.

The leaven disappoints by its *slowness*. One man soweth and another reapeth. The ferment that Jesus has thrust into human society for the present is ' hidden ' and but few signs appear of its working.

And the drag-net disappoints by the *mixed character of its results* : ' which, when it was full, they drew to shore ; and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.' Our Lord has prepared His Church for this, for the reaction that too often follows revival, for the discount to be made in the success of great popular missions both at home and abroad, for the fluctuations and backslidings that are apt to arise in all dealings with the multitude. But the success is none the less real and solid on this account. We may be tried and saddened, but there is no reason to be discouraged. The net is not to blame, nor the fishing a failure, because some bad fish get into it along with the good. Our Lord did not count it a mistake that He had sown the seed so lavishly, because so much fell upon the stony or weed-encumbered ground and bore no

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perfect fruit. Though thread after thread may fail Him and one boat's crew after another proves incompetent or quarrelsome, He goes on sending out His fishermen, and weaving His nets, and the nets of Divine love and wisdom, in which at last the whole world will be caught !

That net is thrown around you and is drawing you to Christ's fishing-boat ; take care that when we reach the eternal shore and the net is emptied, you are found amongst the good fish and not amongst the bad, the insincere, the faithless and useless, who have called Christ Lord and have borne His name, only to be disowned at the last and thrust away for ever.

XIII

THE PARABLE OF THE DOOR

I am the door ; by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture.—JOHN x. 9.

THE Parable for Pastors found in this chapter is two-fold. There is the image, first of the *Sheep-fold Door*, then of the *Good Shepherd*; with each Christ identifies Himself and the two similes melt into one, but as bearing on ourselves the distinction is manifest. Let us look at the first of these, the representation, which Jesus makes with so much emphasis, of Himself as the Door of Life and Duty.

The false Messiahs of the time, these, I suppose, are meant by the expression 'all that ever came before me,' and the swarm of hirelings and robbers have their common mark and their sufficient condemnation in this: they have not *entered in through the door*; they have received no real summons, no Divine and supernatural authorization. Their priesthood is hereditary, or the Christian ministry has presented itself to them as a congenial profession,

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a sphere suitable to their talents. St. Paul expresses the figure of 'the door' when he styles himself 'apostle not from men or through men,' but 'through Jesus Christ and God the Father.' Christ has summoned him, Christ has authorized him, and Christ has qualified him. It is not enough then to say : 'I have not thrust myself into this office. The Church has enlisted me, trained me, stationed me. I have loyally obeyed her, and she is responsible for my ministerial title.' The Church may be 'the porter,' the door-keeper, recognizing and certificating your entrance. Her tests are designed to ascertain God's call, and they are not applied infallibly. To your own Master you 'stand or fall' in this vital matter:

But the parable does not lay stress on the minister's first entrance into the pastoral office so much as on its *continuous exercise*. 'He that entereth in through the door is a shepherd of the sheep.' You note a familiar grammatical point when I observe that the tense of the participle used is the present of habitual action, not the aorist of an event or transaction : 'he who is used to enter,' 'he who is in the way of entering.' Hence the expansion of the figure a little later : 'I am the door ; through Me if any enter' (here is the aorist of the decisive initial entrance), 'he will be saved' (the man's personal salvation is first secured) ; then 'he will go

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in and out and find pasture ' for the sheep of his charge. In that last sentence you see delineated the *to and fro*, the *in and out* of the pastor's daily life ; every act of the Christian ministry, every movement of the shepherd-life, always ' through Me.' Not a step taken, not a plan formed, without reference to Christ, without deference to His will and conformity to His law, without consultation and sanction. If you prepare a sermon, if you call a prayer-meeting, or meet a class, or visit a sick-bed, or attend a committee, or fill in a schedule, each act of your shepherding must be governed by Christ's mind, should be distinctly authorized by Him. What an intimacy with the living Saviour this involves, what a life of watching unto prayer ! You have noticed how this habit of mind comes out in the most unstudied way in St. Paul's letters, under such phrases as ' in Christ,' ' in the Lord,' ' in the name of the Lord Jesus,' ' through Christ Jesus,' ' through the will of God.' For Him Christ was the door of every path in the walk of life.

The insidious temptation in the pastoral life is carelessness and want of scruple in this respect. Through perfunctoriness, through self-sufficiency, through man-pleasing, we may slip easily into some way of dispensing with Christ in the details of our daily work ; we may step into the pulpit or on to the platform, into the study or out to the round of

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pastoral duty, otherwise than through Him, hurrying, climbing up in some other, easier way. That is fatal: that means certain and instant loss of the pastoral touch and power. Every door our hands open or our footsteps pass through should preach to us this parable.

And the promise to the pastor who has come in by the right door, and who keeps to the true door in all his movements and activities, is that he *will find pasture*. He shall feed and enrich the souls of men. He will need to seek it: there must be travail and toil of mind, as well as deep search of the Scriptures; but he will find it, green pastures and still waters in the heart of the wilderness. To be able to feed the minds, to refresh and sustain the hearts of men, in this toil-worn famished world, is there a happier calling? Milton says of the pastors of his day: 'The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.' God forbid that this curse should light on you or me. 'They eat the fat, and clothe themselves with the wool, but they feed not the flock,' said God through Ezekiel. That is what our enemies are ready to say of us to-day. Is it true? Will you take care that it never shall be true?

XIV

THE MISGIVINGS OF FAITH IN A GREAT BELIEVER

And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in Me.—MATT. xi. 6.

COMMENTATORS of authority would fain spare the heroic man whose lapse occasioned this remark of Jesus. They have sought to veil his infirmity by suggesting that he sent his inquiry, not out of any questioning in his own mind, but for the benefit of his unsettled disciples or of the Galilean populace, seeking to elicit from Jesus a more outspoken assertion of the Messiahship. Such artfulness, however, was not in keeping with the simplicity of the Baptist's mind and the downrightness of his character; he was not the man to affect an unbelief he did not feel. Our Lord's reply shows that He regards the occasion as critical, and the challenge addressed to Him as entirely sincere; the inquirer urgently needed reassurance and succour. The generous vindication of John, that Jesus takes occasion to make before the people, is spoken as for one who appeared that day in a character below

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himself, to whom men were likely to do injustice, judging him by the attitude and utterance of the moment. 'Art thou the Coming One, or are we to look for another?' such was the abrupt and peremptory question addressed by the great witness to Jesus at the height of His public work in Galilee: we may be sure he meant every word of it. For the time at least, the Forerunner was greatly anxious and shaken in mind as to the character of Him whom he had announced to Israel as the Christ of God. Here is the boldest and surest of confessors, than whom, as his Master declared, 'there was none greater born of women,' reported as failing in the matter of faith; with his startling query John anticipates our latest modern scepticism: 'Has Jesus failed us, and must the world look elsewhere for its Saviour?' For the moment John the Baptist puts himself in the ranks of the doubters and becomes the mouthpiece of unbelief.

Let us look at the circumstances which gave rise to this disquiet in the Baptist's mind, and which lay on the one hand in his physical situation and on the other in the behaviour of Jesus toward him.

'Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples.' *In the prison*: that accounts for a good deal! He is shut up in the gloomy fastness of Herod Antipas at Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, where his life

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hangs on a thread, at the mercy of a sensual tyrant and a crafty, revengeful woman, whose sin he had denounced. Son of the wilderness and the free air, John is like a caged lion in that stifling den. He is suffering from the confinement and inactivity, as well as from the anxiety of his position, suffering both in mind and body ; and one knows how under such conditions the body tends to warp and to cloud the mind. His testimony to Israel, his proclamation of the Messiah, is ending thus, in impotence, in shame and premature eclipse ! He must die, crushed by the powers of iniquity.

And what is worse, Jesus does not seem to care ! He has reaped the benefit of John's struggles, leaping at once into a popular fame prepared for Him by the Baptist's powerful ministry ; and is leaving him to rot in Herod's prison, when (humanly speaking) it would have been quite within the bounds of possibility for Him to loose the prison-bars of Machaerus. Like most of his sort, Herod Antipas was a coward as well as a libertine, and a word from Jesus, then at the height of His influence in Galilee, might have sufficed to shake Herod's throne for it was none too secure. Our Lord did not say that word ; He did not lift a finger to unloose His friend and comrade. So far as we know, He had not sent a single token of sympathy and kind remembrance to cheer His staunch witness in the hour and power

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of darkness that had come upon him. When a little later some of Christ's ill-wishers would have frightened Him by the warning, given not improbably at official prompting, 'Get thee out and go hence, for Herod means to kill thee,'—intimating that the fate of the Baptist awaited Him—He replied, 'Go and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures to-day, and to-morrow, and the next day ; for it is not allowed to a prophet to perish outside of Jerusalem !' As much as to say, 'My fate is not in Herod's hands ; nor My course to be cut short at his pleasure.' Jesus was scornful of the tyrant's character, and wholly fearless of his power. But he recognized Herod's disposal of the Baptist's life as in the present order of the Father's providence, cruel as the event seemed ; and He would not interfere, though to the motives of human affection, to the dictates of flesh and blood, to the sense of what we may call political interest, it must have been a sore temptation to prevent the murder. John is allowed to perish, the victim of an adulteress's revenge ; and his head, presented dripping with blood upon the dish as the prize of Salome's wanton dance, supplies the crown of Herod's birthday feast. Without resistance or remonstrance Jesus lets this pass. Such things have been done times without number by 'the kings of the earth,' and God has looked on permitting. But the neglect

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on the part of Jesus, and His long silence, were hard indeed to bear.

There were reports too about his Master's behaviour that John heard through unfriendly channels : these deeply troubled him, strict puritan as he was and follower of the old prophets. He heard of Jesus eating and drinking at rich men's tables, and he did not like that ; there was scandal, and there was danger in it. The rumours of this nature which reached him were bound to shock his stern sensibilities. There was an unmistakable and far-reaching difference in temper and habits between the two teachers : the one 'came eating and drinking,' as Jesus put it ; the other 'came neither eating nor drinking.' Of John, austere, passionate, terrific in denunciation, they said, 'He hath a demon' ; of Jesus, 'Behold, a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.' The partisans of the two are compared to 'children, sitting in the market-place,' and quarrelling as to whether the game should be a mock-funeral or wedding ! As John brooded over these matters in the prison, the contrast startled and distressed him ; and the suspicion forced itself upon him, 'Have I been mistaken after all about Jesus ? Is this indeed the Christ we looked for ? or has He fallen away from His high purpose ? Is He choosing the broad and easy instead of the narrow path marked out for

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His steps ? ' Such thoughts tortured this great and honest soul ; they grew upon John, as he chafed and tossed night and day in the prison-house. He hated them, but could not put them from him. So when the opportunity came, the Baptist sent his blunt and outspoken inquiry, delivered to Jesus apparently in the face of the crowd that was then thronging Him, ' Art thou the Coming One, or should we look for some one else ? ' The challenge is surprising as coming from Christ's great witness, the man on whose attestation, it might seem, the whole future of the Messianic faith depended, the ' man sent from God ' for this very end, who ' came to bear witness of the light, that all men through Him might believe.' Now John stands in doubt himself ; he demands credentials from the Christ whom he had so loudly and so confidently proclaimed to the world. How startling, how alarming is the question coming from such lips, at such a moment ! And yet how natural under the circumstances of the hour, how inevitable, one might almost say, that flesh and blood should falter under the pressure it had to bear in John the Baptist ! His doubts were those engendered by environment, by the disappointing and harassing conditions besetting him. And if for an instant he wavered in the fiery trial, we need not think hardly of John as though the strong man had proved a weakling when

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put to the proof. Jesus at any rate judged him very differently.

So we come to consider the reply made by our Lord to the Forerunner's agitated question. The quiet confidence with which the challenge was met, was in itself reassuring. Our Lord is not in the least disconcerted, nor irritated, by His friend's disturbing inquiry. Not a word of reproach or chiding, nor even of surprise, does He utter. He knows how cruelly His questioner is suffering : John is passing through his Gethsemane, and our Lord has His own to meet ! Jesus understands the Baptist quite well, and the way to help him out of his trouble. He has nothing but patience and considerateness for hardly-trying and over-wrought men.

Christ has many fashions of dealing with minds of different order and varying mood ; the reply to John the Baptist exhibits His commonest resource in meeting earnest doubt, and marks out what one may call the main highway of the Christian evidences. Jesus points to the patent fruits of His mission : ' the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me ' (John v. 36, x. 25, 38, xiv. 11, xv. 24). He answers fact with fact, and corrects John's partial, distorted view of life seen through the prison-bars, by the truer and deeper representation of what is going on in Palestine. ' Go your way and tell John,' He says to the two messengers,

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'the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them.' Jesus Christ is a veritable, sensible 'light of the world,' a life-giving, health-diffusing presence amongst men, the 'power of God unto salvation.' The manifest and manifold salvation from Him validates His claims.

The things that threaten the Baptist's faith just now, are admitted facts. It is true that Herod's evil throne stands unshaken, that the prison-doors of Machaerus remain fast-locked, and John must eat his heart out behind them. True that the viper's brood of Annas are nesting in the Temple-courts and crawl about the seats of justice. Here is no Messiah come to ply the winnowing-fan and the axe in the high places of hypocrisy, such as John foretold. But everywhere Jesus moves, there is sight for the blind, healing for body and soul, forgiveness, consolation; a new life and hope in God are coming to the suffering and sin-stricken all through the land; the foundations of God's kingdom are being laid anew and immovably in the hearts of the humble and poor. These are Christ's credentials against all gainsayers, and to the end of time. Here are the tokens to be known and read of all men, that the Saviour-God is with

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Him and He is on His way to conquest. Jesus knows well the tender heart behind the rugged frame and stern temper of His Forerunner. John will be reassured by this report ; his misgivings will be removed and his stumblings stayed ; and, in hope of the glory of God, he will now be ready to meet the headsman's axe, which will shortly cleave open for his brave spirit the gates of Paradise !

Having considered the strange encounter of John the Baptist and Jesus, we may better understand the beatitude it occasioned, a beatitude which this greatest of women-born forfeited by his stumbling, but which, hard though it be to attain, men comparatively little in the kingdom of heaven nevertheless may win : ' Blessed is he,' concluded Jesus, ' whosoever shall not be offended in Me.' Our Lord speaks of it as a rare and peculiar happiness, resting under a special blessing of God, to maintain a faith in Him that is never put out, never shocked and scandalized and brought to a stand, never visited by despondencies and misgivings in face of the contradictions it encounters from a hostile world. The sentence plainly implies that, to the mind of the Redeemer, faith in Him was, and was bound to be, a much-hindered and difficult thing.

This difficulty was not one of the moment and peculiar to the circumstances ; it lay in the nature of the case, in the measureless value and efficacy

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of faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing that is first-rate is ever cheap. You are bidden indeed, 'every one that thirsteth,' to 'come to the waters' and 'buy without money and without price': nothing else is given so freely as God's supreme gifts of grace, 'price' being understood in terms of human effort and the world's daily market. But there are wares inestimable, bought 'without money and price' because they are beyond price and incommensurable. Hopes and futures laid up in heaven fetch nothing on the stock exchange; faith and love have no commercial value, they are *infinitely* precious. We grow rich in such wealth at cost of soul, by sacrifices of spirit and a tasking of the inner nature which Jesus calls 'losing one's life (soul) to gain it.' The fierce storms and trials that met the soul in following Jesus then, the numberless obstacles which rose up in its path, were evidence, to His mind, of the supreme worth of this attachment and of the vast issues dependent on fidelity to it. In this sense the Apostle Peter, after many years of experience, wrote to believers of the first age about 'the trial of your faith which is more precious than gold,' and bids them 'not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you': gold must go through the flame. To this effect St. Peter had been warned at the critical hour of his life: 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you,

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that he might sift you as wheat ' (Luke xxii. 31). Wheat, because it is such, is bound to pass through the sieve ; for *weeds* no sieve is wanted. In like terms St. Paul admonishes his converts ' that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God ' (Acts xiv. 22). The times have brought many changes, but they have not dispensed with this necessity. A faith of any depth and worth and capacity for fruitfulness infallibly encounters trial ; rarely does it come through the struggle without wounds. ' Every branch in Me,' said the True Vine, ' which beareth fruit, My Father pruneth it that it may bear more fruit.'

Christ's word is to the point for ourselves to-day. It is the exception, and not the rule, for a Christian man of active and resolute temper, of a deeply sincere, religious mind, such as John the Baptist was, to preserve a life-long faith unscarred, a loyalty unmoved by any blast of doubt, knowing nothing but an uninterrupted ' peace and joy in believing.' This happiness is possible as it is enviable, and there are examples of it ; but it is by no means the ordinary experience of the Christian people whom we know.

Many are inclined to think that the times in which we live are peculiarly adverse to faith. ' Never,' they cry, ' was the upward path so steep and rough ; never before was the enemy so strong, the world

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so unkind or so seductive, so baffling in its perplexities ; never did God so hide and shroud Himself as He does from modern men.' This Job's tale is as old as human life ; you will scarcely find a generation of the past with no record of such speeches. There is always in evidence a type of people who see in their own age the worst and the unhappiest of all time, who regard their particular trials as the hardest, their situation as the most deplorable in which men were ever placed. Let us have a little common-sense and courage ; let us be just to our times, and not magnify the forces against us or intimidate ourselves by our unworthy fears and exaggerated outcries.

Our religious difficulties are some of them new and specific to the present times : those arising, for instance, from the advance of science, and its overweening claims to the dominance of human thought ; from the sharpening of the weapons of criticism, and the doubts it throws upon the word of God and all supernatural realities ; from the growth of luxury and the softness of fibre, both physical and spiritual, this produces : from the increase of pride and self-assertion, and the vanity of free-thinking, which attend the spread of democracy. These and kindred influences operate powerfully against religion in the twentieth century, and lay stumbling-blocks for our feet not easily to be avoided

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or surmounted. But as fresh hindrances are placed in the way, old obstacles disappear ; former disabilities for faith have been removed and stones of offence dislodged from the track. New aids and encouragements are afforded us ; hopes and sympathies are awakened and prospects opened up that were lacking to our fathers. Examples multiply ; the ' cloud of witnesses ' becomes more thronged and imposing as time passes ; the highway of the Lord is built up more securely as one century succeeds another. ' Many prophets and righteous men,' said Jesus to His contemporaries, ' desired to see the things that ye see, and saw them not ' : with tenfold emphasis He would say the same to His friends of to-day. ' The ways of the Lord ' are indeed more ' equal ' as between one generation and another, and the light of faith much more uniform in character from age to age, than many of us imagine.

From the outset there always have been occasions for offence, if one were disposed to take them. ' It is impossible but that occasions of stumbling should come,' said Jesus at a later time, when He had had much experience of scandal and quarrel amongst His chosen ; ' but woe unto him through whom they come ! ' In our Lord's *entourage* palpable grounds for unbelief presented themselves, reasons enough and to spare for misgivings about

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Him, and for doubts as to the success, and even the reality, of His mission. The Author of Faith recognizes this certainty and reckons with it. The necessity which St Paul affirmed for the 'divisions' which gave him so much trouble in Corinth and brought upon the Church so much scandal and reproach, is of wide scope and frequent recurrence: 'There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.' Plausible errors and party-cries attract the light-minded and superficial converts, leaving those of a stable faith undisturbed. The sifting was inevitable; Judas was bound to 'go to his own place' and Peter to rap out the base denial of his Master. The Master of Life was perfectly aware that it would be natural for men to be offended in Him, easy to find pretexts for unbelief, and a rare and difficult thing to put them all aside untroubled. Indeed, Jesus often acted and spoke in a manner seemingly designed to raise hindrances and objections and to choke off an easygoing discipleship. He would have men 'count the cost': they must understand clearly that to follow Him meant 'the cross,' meant the world's contempt and hatred, meant the abnegation of self and the forfeiture of secular gain and glory. To share 'the reproach of Christ,' to follow to the end unshrinking in the way of the Crucified, can never be a pleasant thing for flesh

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and blood, never a road of mere satisfaction and delight, so long as time and human nature last. For beings such as we are, in a world like this, the command must always be : ' Strive to enter in by the narrow door ! ' Could we really expect or desire it otherwise ?

Let us ask in conclusion, how Christ's reply to John's scepticism avails for our day. He appeals to the living testimony of His work of salvation as a sufficient answer to all such inquiries. These are ' things new and old,' which belong to ancient and modern times alike ; they are not in the least degree antiquated or out of date. Without the confirmation of present-day fact, of ' the works that ' Jesus is still ' doing in the Father's name,' our books of Christian evidence are scarcely worth the paper they are written upon. If God is the Living Father, the Eternal, and Jesus Christ is ' the same yesterday and to-day,' the proofs we expect of their being and their authority must be drawn from actuality ; God and Christ are surely sovereign factors of the life of the present day, at work amongst the men we know and ' not far from any one of us.'

In the middle of the eighteenth century England was shaken to its centre by religious doubt. Rationalism was triumphant, and wise and serious men predicted the speedy disappearance of Christianity.

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It was said that at this period not a dozen members of the British House of Commons were in the habit of attending Divine Worship of any kind. Many *Defences of the Faith* were made, and some able *Apologies* were published. Butler's *Analogy of Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, in particular, was a masterly reply to the current unbelief of the age and carried the war with effect into the ranks of scepticism. Its main argument holds good to-day, with a wider bearing than when first conceived ; the *Analogy* is a classic of religion. But what was it that killed eighteenth-century Rationalism, and has demolished it so completely that the very names of its champions, except perhaps those of Tom Paine in England and Voltaire in France, are now forgotten ? It was not the genius of Joseph Butler, not the turn in the tide of philosophic thought ; it was the Methodist Revival that gave its death-wound to the prevalent British unbelief of two hundred years ago, and that transformed the spiritual outlook and moral atmosphere of our English forefathers and prepared them to meet the world-shock of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. ' The works that ' Jesus did ' in the Father's name ' in these islands through His servants the Wesleys and their coadjutors, these works supplied the effectual witness to Him. These are the master-facts of history.

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Such events and movements determine the current of the centuries.

Many men are to-day in a position resembling that of the Baptist looking through his prison-bars ; they are in surroundings hostile to Christ and to faith, and quite unaware of the facts about the living Saviour and the progress and efficacy of Christianity. 'Go, and tell John,' you that know ; tell what the Lord has done for your soul, what you have seen Him do for others, and heard of His doing abroad in the earth. Let men know that Jesus lives and saves. If you are in any doubt yourself, inquire candidly in the right quarters, as the Baptist did ; ascertain the facts as to the fruits of Evangelism, amongst the lost in city slums where Christ is mending His 'broken earthenware,' and amongst the heathen in missionary lands. Do *you* know, for instance, that in a single country, in Korea on the outer rim of Asia, where within the lifetime of many now living Christ's name was unknown, there exists at this day a Church of more than a hundred thousand souls, and a work for God has been achieved amid hardship and persecution, comparable in extent and thoroughness to all that was wrought in the world during the first Christian age ? 'Go, and tell John,' your scoffing neighbour, your downcast and disheartened Christian friend, such facts as these. Let your light of Christian knowledge

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shine. Do this justice to your Master, and this kindness to your fellow men ; and honest hearts will be reassured, and a stumbling faith helped to its feet again.

Never was the writer's personal faith in the gospel quickened and stimulated quite so signally as when he stood in the midst of a Methodist Church in an outcaste village in South India, and saw with his own eyes how God is raising up ' out of those stones,' from creatures trampled and defaced beyond human form by ages of pitiless oppression, ' children unto Abraham,' men and women devout, intelligent, free, and self-respecting, wearing again their Maker's image. Tears came to his eyes, wonder and praise to his lips day after day, as he witnessed the heavenly transformation. ' Behold,' said the Redeemer of men, ' I make all things new.' And people who have not seen and heard have no idea that such things are going on. You that are ' instructed unto the kingdom of God,' turn your knowledge to account ; tell the story of Jesus, of the living, redeeming God, wherever you can ; testify to the truth. You are robbing the world, you are allowing doubt to flourish and scepticism to luxuriate, and God to be defrauded of His high glory, by your apathy and silence. The facts of history and of modern life, truly reported and justly interpreted, speak decisively on behalf of Jesus Christ

The Misgivings of Faith

and His salvation ; rightly construed, they are all upon His side.

There are other lessons, not difficult to read, suggested by the stumbling of John the Baptist, that may be named and left to the reader's reflexion. One such consideration is that *doubt is not denial* ; the clouds pass, the sun shines out again. A man must not be judged by his transient moods, but by his settled temper and attitude. ' I said in my haste,' the Psalmist confesses, ' a foolish and unjust thing, and vented a libel upon life, maligning my own kind.' The retractations of Scripture have their part in its discipline ; our Lord's forerunner would gladly make his contribution to the list. Most of all, let us learn to *turn our doubts into prayers*. Take your questionings straight to the living Saviour. Don't nurse them in sullen reserve, in secret, brooding suspicion. Confess frankly to your Master your worst fears and scepticisms. He is not afraid of them ; He understands you, and can make allowance, as He did for His first confessor when he faltered. He will send you an answer that will turn your very doubts into confirmation and establishment of faith. The sincere, distressed heart receives nothing but consideration and tenderness at the hands of the Good Physician. Yours shall be ' the blessedness of the man whose sins are forgiven,' whose doubts and misgivings are all

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dispelled, and who finds in Jesus Christ no longer the stone of stumbling and rock of offence, but the soul's everlasting foundation, the Rock of Ages for the whole world.

XV

THE BEQUEST OF JESUS

Let not your heart be troubled : believe in God, believe also in Me.—JOHN xiv. 1. (R. V. margin.)

THIS communion-table, where we are 'called into the fellowship of God's Son,' is a haven of peace amid the storm, alike for seasons of personal grief and for times of doubt and stress affecting the Church herself and the vocation of the Christian ministry. The communion-feast that we commemorate to-day was held amid sorrow and alarm. The Church, which He had declared to be founded on the rock, was tossed now by a storm fiercer than that which surged round His bark on the Galilean lake. He alone was calm and joyous, while every heart around Him shook with fear. Judas at that very moment was plotting with the priests ; Jesus was to leave the Upper Room to meet the anguish of the Garden and the traitor's kiss ; but He was full of satisfaction and hope. Hardly had He known on earth so serene an hour ; never did He speak with a loftier assurance.

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It was a perfect illustration of His own maxim, 'Be not anxious for the morrow !' No self-concern should cloud the enjoyment of that evening of perfect friendship, or mar the sympathy with which Jesus bends all His powers to console and encourage His sorrowful brethren. 'Let not your heart be troubled,' so His talk at the table began ; 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' so it ended. It may be well for us to look afresh at the grounds of re-assurance that Jesus gave to His friends at that hour, the darkest of all dark hours for the outlook of God's kingdom and for the future of mankind : 'Let not your heart be troubled,' He cries ; '*believe in God.*' Well, that is the commonplace of religion ; and, because it is so, the assurance of faith should be equally commonplace. God is the everlasting rock : His character, His fidelity, is the ultimate ground of human hope and trust ; to this the heart clings in its uttermost fear and need. But Jesus Christ had made this ground broader and more accessible than before, by His manifestation of the Father ; He had brought it nearer to men and made it more distinct and apprehensible in the emergencies of life. From His lips the words, 'Believe in God,' carried a meaning richer, tenderer, more commanding than on the lips of the holiest prophet or the wisest sage before Him. Faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ banishes trouble

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of heart and gives a peace so deep that the wildest storms can but touch its surface.

Now it would seem to some that Jesus should have stopped when He had said, 'Believe in God,' for the appeal is complete and final; but He adds, '*Believe also in Me!*' And this addition, or rather this interpretation, this unfolding and blossoming out of the heart of the Israelite faith, is the truth that makes Christianity; not 'Believe in God as I believe, share My faith in God,' but, 'Believe in God and believe in Me, let Me share your faith in God!' How intolerable such an assumption would have been in any mere man, the purest and noblest, sitting amongst his fellows! How inconceivable that the Jewish reporter should have framed this saying for the mouth of Jesus, if He had not uttered it! How inevitable the demand is from *Him*! Jesus Himself would hardly have given such a challenge at an earlier stage of His work. His previous intercourse with the disciples had led up to this point. He had gradually identified Himself with God as a Son with the Father and bound up their thoughts and hopes of God's kingdom with His person; their faith in God and in the future were now so completely wrapped up in Him, that the words gave no shock, but appealed to a faith latent already in their minds and ready to respond at the decisive touch. It was this twin faith, twofold and one,

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in the Father revealed by the Son, in the Son attested by the Father, that was to be put to proof at the hour of His departure.

Now, brethren, it is by this faith that the Church of Jesus lives and prevails. When Simon Peter some months before, under a special inspiration, confessed it, or at least came near to the confession of what is implied in this association by Jesus of Himself with God as the object of faith, saying, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' the answer came, 'On this rock I will build My Church!' while the climax of John's gospel is given by the response of Jesus to Thomas' confession of Him as 'My Lord and my God!' This is the faith that lives and saves; it is the faith that Jesus claims at this table from those who speak in His name.

If the modern mind of the second century, or of the twentieth century, cannot receive it, so much the worse for the modern mind; but those who assume to speak on behalf of the modern mind sometimes belie it. 'Who is he that overcometh the world,' cries St. John, 'but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?' It is the Divinity of the Saviour, the Godhead of the Crucified, this stooping of the Almighty love beneath the burden of my guilt, the word of the man who, in dying a victim to human sin, reveals Himself one with the Eternal Father who sent Him, it is this infinite

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'scandal of the cross,' this picture of 'the suffering Son of God, the streaming blood divine,' that astounds, subdues, transforms, inspires, like nothing else that has ever appeared to the eyes or sounded in the ears of men. ' 'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for . . . My flesh that I seek in the God-head !' This is 'the faith that overcometh,' before which, when it has free course, nothing can stand, the one possible world-missionary faith. We believe in Him as we believe in God ; we believe in God unto salvation, because we believe in Him. We worship at 'the throne of God and of the Lamb.'

Now, further, the departing Saviour, for our consolation, attaches to this apprehension of His fellowship of being with God a new conception of *immortality*. It is the union of Father and Son in the eternal habitations that makes heaven a home. So Jesus anticipates for Himself, and, with the anticipation, opens the door for the many brethren. His next sentence is : ' In My Father's house are many mansions ; I go to prepare a place for you.' Home is near for the Eternal Son of God ; Jesus sees the golden gates shining across the dark river. His own place is there, and it is a prospect of supreme comfort and delight for Himself ; but He is not going back by way of escape, to recover the glory that was His from all eternity ; He has now a new

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and dear purpose in returning to the Father's side, 'to prepare a place for you!' Heaven itself will not be home for Jesus without His earthly friends, and to make ready for them yonder will be His business and joy. And in this parting Jesus took home with Him to Paradise from the anguish of the cross the dying robber, the forerunner of us all. That He might do so, was the consolation of the Cross, the earnest of the glory that should follow.

We, as dying men, need this comfort of the Lord's table, which affords the foretaste of the marriage-supper of the Lamb. To our faith in the Son of God this entrancing hope is linked. It may not be always present, nor often uppermost in our thoughts; but there will be hours of fear and of the shadow of death, when this anchor of the soul will be the sum of salvation for us. And as Christ's ministers, to the dying as well as to the sinful, the vision of the Father's house will have to be real and enchanting to our own souls, or we shall fail in our ministry by the death-bed and the grave-side. Yonder is the home of our pilgrimage, the goal of life's weary race; and Jesus declares Himself 'the way,' the way to God and to heaven, to the Father and the Father's house. To think of that other world as the abode where Jesus is perfectly loved and obeyed and for ever at home, where everything is to His mind, where all the rooms are at His ordering and disposal,

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and as the Son of the house He welcomes His own guests—can there be a more beautiful, a more realistic and satisfying conception of heaven than that? These words put faith completely at rest. We know the way; we know sufficiently the goal.

Let it be understood that Jesus Christ offers Himself, in His sole person, as the comrades of His table knew Him, as He stands before us in the Gospel record upon their testimony, for the guarantee of all He now affirms. Our Lord does this in the conversation at the Supper-table so gently, so meekly, so entirely in the way of friendship and sympathy, that the reader often fails to realize the stupendous significance of the expressions used. 'I am the way,' He asserts, 'the truth, and the life'; 'he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.' Of all His doctrine about God, *He* is the demonstration; of His promises respecting the eternal life, *He* is the pledge. He who understands what God gives us in Jesus Christ lacks nothing for himself or for his ministry; 'we are complete in Him.' 'Drinking of the water' He has given, we cannot 'thirst'; 'eating of this bread,' 'the flesh' He has 'given for the life of the world,' we 'shall never hunger.' 'How sayest thou: Show us the Father?' 'Give us some stronger proof,' men are saying, 'some sign out of heaven that none can gainsay, some evidence that will silence dispute; lift the veil and let us see

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the goal of our earthly journey, let us hear authentic voices from beyond the tomb ! ' To all this Jesus replies : ' Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known *Me*, Philip ? '

The knowledge the disciples had gained of the Son of God through those three years of fellowship, and which we have through their report, this should be enough, and will be enough for men who have eyes for the truth. The greatest intellect, the most passionate heart of that first age, deemed the world well lost 'for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' ; and still Paul's goal was, when he had known and preached Christ for a quarter of a century and the end was drawing near, ' that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed unto His death.' So it is with us still : the most gifted and powerful man whom our times have known in the Methodist ministry, has it written on his tomb, ' Thou, O Christ, art all I want.' Faith in Jesus Immanuel, God with us, there is a message for mankind which, despite the contradiction of sinners, speaks from age to age with ever-renewed force and aptness. To some a stumbling-block, to others folly, our gospel is to-day, as livingly, as distinctly as at first, ' Christ the wisdom of God,' and ' Christ the power of God.'

Our Lord's certainty respecting Himself, respecting

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His relations to the Father, respecting His power to guide and to save the world He loved, gave Him the heavenly serenity which evermore breathes at this table ; this confidence in His own person, this conscious right to make the challenge, ' Believe in Me,' enabled Him to say to these trembling men whom He sent forth as lambs amongst wolves : ' Peace I leave with you : My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled ; neither let it be afraid.'

In thus presenting Himself, in His oneness with the Eternal Father, as the rock of human faith, our Lord points His disciples to the two expressions of Himself that were stamped upon their memory and by them to be communicated to mankind, His *words* and His *works*. He speaks of them in one breath as constituting a living whole : ' the words that I speak to you, I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me doeth His works.'

The words of Jesus, as the temple-police confessed when they came back empty-handed from their attempt to seize Him, are ' such as never man spake,' and ' such,' we may add when their authority is challenged, ' as never man fancied or invented ' ; they are ' words,' as Simon Peter declared a year before, ' of eternal life.' The greatest masters of human thought acknowledge their mastery. A complete anthology of the divinest things said by

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other teachers would not match the sayings of the Four Gospels ; and in such a collection it would probably be found that the best of its utterances had caught their inspiration, directly or indirectly, from the words of the Lord Jesus. These are the treasures of human language ; and we would sacrifice all other books to keep them. ' The words that I have spoken unto you,' He once declared, ' they are spirit and are life ' ; they have lived, and have breathed life into man's soul, through all time since. The simple explanation of the unearthly power of the words of Jesus is that which He gave : ' He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God.' They come from the heart of eternal love and truth beating in the breast of Jesus.

He passes in the same sentence from ' the words ' to ' the works,' as though the two were hardly distinguishable. They were in fact complimentary manifestations of the same unique human and yet superhuman personality. The specific ' works ' of Jesus, the ' miracles ' as we call them, the ' signs ' as this Gospel always designates them, are so interwoven with His teaching that we must in the end accept both or neither. They are one as the voice and hands of the same person. To cut out from the gospel-story the supernatural deeds is a sheer mutilation ; they cannot be eliminated ; they cannot be explained away.

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The wisest scientist acknowledges his limits, and recognizes that there are facts of the spiritual as well as of the natural realm and that the former underlies the latter, sometimes with volcanic force breaking through the crust of its uniformities to inaugurate a new order, to bring in a new heaven and earth. It will not do for us to ignore or apologize for our Master's mighty deeds. They are not mere external evidences and buttresses to the spiritual gospel ; they are a part of the gospel itself, a gospel for the body as the Cross is the gospel for the soul. To these the First Evangelist applied the prophetic words respecting the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, no less than to the sacrifice of Calvary : ' Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.' Our conception of the character and mission of Jesus is moulded and coloured through and through by the influence of His miracles ; the entire philanthropy of Christendom is rooted here. The blank that would be created by their disappearance, by the total loss of belief in them, is such as we cannot imagine. They have brought home to mankind the Divine compassion, the sense of our heavenly Father's interest in material life and in the distresses of our mortal lot, in a manner otherwise impossible, and with an effect indispensable to the commendation of the gospel.

Now what Jesus has said should suffice, does in

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effect suffice, for His friends at the Supper-table, as they look on His face, as they remember all He had said and done before their eyes. They are sure of Him, they are sure of God, while He is with them. But He is going; those tender, wonder-working hands will cease their office; the words they hear are words of farewell. Jesus will soon be but a memory lodged in their hearts, which they feel themselves powerless to impart to others, powerless to vindicate before the world that dooms Him to death. Can Jesus suppose that His handful of slow-hearted and dispirited men will be able to make Him live again, to succeed where He has to all appearance failed, to snatch victory for His cause out of the death of the cross? There is every prospect, to human eyes, that His name will perish; that His Messiahship will prove but a nine days' wonder, announced on Palm Sunday to end on Good Friday; the Church He thought to have founded will collapse with the Founder's death. All this Jesus understood better than any one else. Our situation as we gather at His table with His ministry to the modern world committed to us, is hardly less dismaying; for our sake, no less than theirs, He adds the promise, so gloriously fulfilled to them and commended to us by continuous fulfilment since: 'I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may be with you for ever, even

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the Spirit of truth . . . He will testify of Me, and do ye also testify . . . He will convict the world . . . He will guide you into all the truth . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and show it unto you.'

Our Lord at this moment casts the care of His Church on this Other One, whom He calls 'the Advocate,' 'the Spirit of the Truth,' personal as Himself is personal, unseen but present and potent in the innermost of being, linking believers in Him to the eternal truth, operating in them as the disembodied presence of the very Christ. So that, for practical purposes, there will be hereafter not one but many Christs, living, witnessing, dying amongst men. Hence Jesus Christ goes on to say: 'I will not leave you desolate. I am coming to you. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.' 'If any man love Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make our abode with him.' Hence His Apostle Paul could say, as a man living in the Spirit, led by the Spirit of Jesus: 'I live no longer; Christ lives in me. . . . Christ speaking in me is mighty to youward. . . . Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate?' From the day of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost began the glorious immortal life of Jesus Christ in mankind,

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the enthronement of the Eternal Father and the Son of His love in the reign of the Holy Ghost within the Church.

Here you have the balance of the two elements whose union makes up the life of religion, the historical and the mystical in Christianity, the body and soul of faith, the memory of the words and works of Jesus vitalized in us each by the breath of the Paraclete. Detached from the historical Christ and the abiding word of Scripture, the Holy Spirit has no vehicle through which to work, no adequate truth to which to testify, no ground on which to base His argument in convicting the world of sin and righteousness; cut loose from the historical revelation, the religion of the Spirit becomes a vague intellectualism on the one hand or a feverish emotionalism upon the other. And without the life-giving Spirit, the religion of the Bible becomes a barren dogmatism and worship of the letter, an orthodoxy that builds sepulchres to Christ and to His prophets, while perchance it stones those in whom He truly lives and works.

Amid the surging and clamour of the new times and the shaking of old foundations, amid the failures of our Churches and our own faintness of heart and feebleness of thought, there is one thing from which we may draw joy unspeakable this day and a hope that maketh not ashamed; it is 'the promise

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of the Father,' conveyed under the covenant tokens to the comrades of His table.

You remember in what terms the pledge was renewed to those same men on the day of His resurrection: 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and should rise from the dead on the third day, and that there should be preached in His name repentance and remission of sins amongst all the nations . . . you are witnesses of these things. And lo! I send forth the promise of My Father upon you. But do you tarry . . . until you be endued with power from on high.' The time has visibly, literally, come for the preaching of His gospel among all the nations, the time therefore for the enduement of Christ's messengers in full measure with 'power from on high.' That mysterious power is not absent; it works at times in us mightily; there are vivid manifestations and deep experiences of the Spirit, illuminations glancing on this man and on that, touching now this faculty and now that. But the promise is that we shall 'put on' the Holy Ghost, that He shall swathe and cover us from head to foot, shall so invest witnessess of Christ with Himself that self shall be swallowed up in them, and Christ, Christ only, shall be seen and heard in them.

'Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you . . . I am *coming* to you!' He comes again,

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in the hour of fear and abandonment. Prepare your hearts to receive Him ! The need is the token of the coming supply. Prayer and loving obedience are the sole conditions for the fulfilment of His immense promise : ' If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me,' He added, ' ye will keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, that He may dwell with you for ever ! '

XVI

THINGS THAT ARE NOT SHAKEN

And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain.—HEB. xii. 27.

THE writer of this profound Epistle lived in a time of world-convulsion resembling our own. The Judaism in which he and his readers had been reared was, as he tells them, 'waxing old and ready to vanish away.' Religiously and politically it was in the throes of dissolution. While he was writing, in all probability, the Jewish war with Rome had already begun which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem after the most appalling siege known in the annals of warfare. To the pious Hebrew this was like 'the end of all things!'

And not the Jewish nation only, but the Roman Empire itself, which stood for the civilized world of that day, was shaken to its centre. It may have been a few months after the writing of this letter, when the Emperor Nero, the foulest monster that ever occupied a great throne, fell by the dagger of the assassin, leaving no assured successor. Instantly

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the Empire was in flames ! The armies marched on Rome from west, north, and east. One after another the great generals seized the sceptre, each in his turn to be struck down by a stronger rival. The Imperial City suffered the horrors of siege and conflagration. Wise and sober men feared that the very fabric of society was breaking up and the world would be thrown back into barbarism.

Amid the universal shaking of the things that seemed strongest and most solid in the frame of human society, this inspired Christian thinker writes to reassure his trembling Hebrew friends. He points them to the things that remain immovable amidst a universal change, and helps them to take refuge there. His words may afford us the like help in this epoch of world-war and revolution. The transient, he tells them, exists for the abiding. The things that change are changeable and passing, shadows that sweep across the face of the Eternal. The sands shift, the rock stands firm beneath the tempest, nay, it becomes more visible and more accessible as the sands which covered it are swept away. The superficial, with its gloss and glitter, is broken through in the collision of the great world-forces, and we discover where true work and enduring strength reside. Our make-believes and comfortable delusions, our refuges of lies, fail us when the storm beats down and the rush of great waters is upon

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us. Then we are lost indeed, unless we know where to 'lay hold on eternal life.'

Let us look, in the light of this calm and lofty teaching, at some of the things which, now as then, abide unshaken, while the world of the nations rocks and heaves as in earthquake around us.

First, there is *God Himself*, His being, His power, His faithfulness and fatherhood remain constant, undiminished. He is a personal, a living God, my God, your God: not a blind fate, not a cold abstract Infinitude, not the Great All of Things, the Sum Total of the Powers of the Universe, but the Supreme Intelligence and Will, the Infinite Grace and Goodness made manifest in Jesus Christ. He is 'with us'; He is 'for us'; and He is the 'All in All.'

Well, *that* stands sure, whatever else gives way and fails us in the tremendous encounter; and the waves dash and break upon the Christian faith in the Everlasting God whose name is love, whose word is truth, whose will is our salvation, like the hurricane upon the granite cliffs. With this confidence Jesus comforted Himself and His disciples at the blackest hour of human history: 'Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God; believe also in Me.' So we do and will! God is sure, though every other hold-fast should betray us; and having Him, we have all!

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I dwell upon this because I have heard of people, men who worshipped in Methodist Chapels and had counted themselves Christians, saying, 'Well, if we are beaten, if Germany gets to the top and England goes down, then I have done with religion ; God is no use, if He can let such things happen.' Men sling out in passion wild and rash words they do not strictly mean ; and God is not swift to mark such outcries. Yet such a temper is one of the worst omens of defeat. That was just the posture of the Jerusalem Jews of Jeremiah's time, when Nebuchadnezzar's siege-train was thundering against their walls. You say : ' I shall not trust God any more if He lets my child die, if He lets my business fail, if He lets my country sink, if He lets my earthly happiness fade.' Consider what that challenge means ; it means that you love God not for His own sheer sake, but for the goods He sends you ; you treat Him as a means to self-ends. He will not be so treated. God will never be satisfied with a faith that walks by sight, that demands visible guarantees and builds on material success. What would God do, what did He do, with a people that behaved to Him as Jeremiah's fellow-citizens did ? He drove them naked and howling into exile, that, stripped of natural pride and earthly joy, they might learn to value Him for His own sake alone, and not for the sake of the pleasant land and the fortress

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city He had given them. A fair-weather faith is next door to unbelief.

The only faith worthy of our God, worthy of the followers of the Crucified, is the faith of Job, sitting on the ash-heap, who when his wife mocked at him cried : ' Though He slay me, I will trust in Him ' ; the faith which sings :

Though waves and storms go o'er my head,
Though strength, and health, and friends be gone,
Though joys be withered all and dead,
Though every comfort be withdrawn,
On this my steadfast soul relies,—
Father, Thy mercy never dies !

That, then, stands the first and last amongst ' the things which are not shaken.'

Now, further, if the being and character of God are immutable, then *the throne of righteousness* stands fast for ever. With the removing of shaken politics and systems, we may count upon it that His seat of world judgement will not be displaced ; but more and more, according to His promise, ' the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.'

Again, we must lay it to heart that the Divine vindication does not lie in the mere material gains of righteousness ; and further, we must not make haste to judge by the near and immediate issues of right or wrong-doing on the part of nations and

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their rulers. If the laws of God's spiritual kingdom operated visibly and at once, like gravitation or like gunpowder, there would be no room for faith, for the discipline and patience which form character. 'The Lord God is a God of judgement ; blessed are all they that wait for Him.'

We are confronted just now with the doctrine, openly proclaimed and vehemently asserted, that in international relations, that is to say in all the larger affairs of the world, *Might is right* ! We need not, after all, be so much surprised at this ; it is only the application upon the grandest scale, upon the great theatre of world politics, of a familiar principle which multitudes of mean men act upon in the trivial matters of their own daily responsibility. How many a man amongst us has played the petty tyrant to his own family circle or amongst his work-people, has taken a grasping advantage of his neighbour's necessity in the business exchanges of life ! We are witnessing this right of the strongest, this law of opportunity, applied in a deeply laid and consummately organized attempt to win the political mastery of the world by force, an attempt in which all moral scruples have been flung aside. Now this is, if any can be, a defiance of the Divine Government, an assault upon the throne of Almighty Justice. 'The Judge of all the earth' is bound to deal with it ; we may be very sure He will,

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in His own time and way. But suppose England too were to become as Belgium in 1914, could we doubt any more for that, those of us who survived the overthrow, that right is right? Dare we imagine that any triumphs of military power could overthrow the throne of Righteousness or shift the fixed foundations of the moral universe? Thank God, the answer to this question is not wanting. There are those men and women, not a day's journey from here, who have seen their homes filled with rapine, their sons dragged away to slavery, their cities and sanctuaries levelled with the dust, who yet hold fast their integrity and dare not charge God foolishly; who know well, in face of the triumph of world-war, that 'Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth' and in His chosen time will break utterly the yoke of lawless might.

Robert Browning has put our faith in the moral order of the world into fitting words, when he describes the man brave in this confidence as

One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break;
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph;
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake!

Once more, amongst the things remaining signally unchanged is *human nature*, not beyond change, thank God, in its evil qualities, but up to the present

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continuing in its worst as in its noblest features, startlingly the same.

Whatever our recent experience reveals or is going to reveal about God, it is a terrible revelation of man ! Some one said, ' The war took the lid off Hell ! ' So it did off the hell within the human breast. It was all there before, the greed, the pride, the hate, the cruelty ; they have come boiling, blazing forth from the black depths of the human heart, like the lava waves of a volcano, spreading desolation over the fairest lands of Europe. It is an apocalypse of original sin. The varnish of civilization is knocked off, and we behold, naked and unashamed, the primitive passions of the race, as potent in the savant as in the savage, when the fear of God is gone from before his eyes, and when once he has ' broken the bands and cast away the cords ' of moral restraint.

We were half thinking, in our folly, that the civilized European had left the brute behind. Education, to be sure, had superseded conversion ; as Sir Oliver Lodge told us not long before the war : ' The modern man was not worrying about his sins,' and we preachers did not worry him overmuch ! Culture and science were bringing in the millennium ; the march of knowledge, the good sense and enlightenment of these modern times, afforded a sufficient guarantee for the progress of the race,

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for the maintenance of world-order, and the moral welfare of communities and nations, quite apart from religion and the gospel of our fathers. Does any one think so now ? Clearly, the golden age is not coming along that road ! Science, in unscrupulous hands, is the most terrible danger with which the human race has ever been confronted. The end of a godless civilization is plainly hell upon earth. If the infernal depths of the human soul are laid bare in the scenes we have witnessed during the last three years, its supernal heights gleam out again. What stirring heroisms, what glorious sacrifices, what a high contempt of death, what a heart of love to country and to comrades was shown even by men we thought commonplace ! What a wealth of compassion and help was lavished on the wounded and the destitute, what patient, tender skill spent upon their sufferings, by many of the most gifted and most affluent ! Our eyes have filled with tears of pity and gratitude as we have read the stories coming from the scenes of war by land and sea. We had scarcely thought that human nature could dare and bear so much. Verily ' faith, hope, and love abide.' Fortitude, honour, discipline endure, and are things unshaken in our people ; the capacity for them is as great in our sons to-day as in our forefathers of the olden times. Our fellow countrymen, our fellow men in other nations, are worth living for and dying

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for, worth saving to eternal life, seeing that they can rise, even those who perhaps seem to us but mean and common, to such heights at the call of duty.

Now finally, these things being so, God in His righteousness and mercy, man in the virulence of his sins and in his capacities remaining the same as in times past, then the *purpose and plan of redeeming grace* stand sure amid the ruins of time ; and we may rest in the confidence that, despite the convulsions which are shaking the secular fabric of the world, God's purpose is grounding itself more effectually in the convictions of mankind. Those convulsions are clearing new pathways and shaking open new doors for the incoming of the Redeemer's kingdom. We are reminded again of the New Testament age and the times preceding the coming of Christ, when the wars and distress then prevailing were interpreted as ' birthpangs of the Messiah,' as the inevitable pains attending on the bringing in of a better age.

There are several reasons which might be pointed out for entertaining such hope in this sad time. Of this we may be sure, that God's grand ' purpose of the ages,' ' to gather into one all things in Christ,' is not shaken by the sinister events transpiring around us. Our Master is not in the least surprised or disconcerted by anything that has happened. The war was indeed the outcome of human sin and

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passion, but the Almighty and All-wise had His hand upon it. He sits above the water-floods, and manages their fury. The tremendous forces of modern militarism are not a whit too strong for Him. Germany and Austria, France and England and America, all the Great Powers together, can no more thwart His counsels to-day than could Egypt or Babylon three thousand years ago. Do you remember what He said by His prophet Isaiah to Sennacherib, the militarist bully of those days, when he had defied the Lord of Hosts ? ' I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way that thou camest,' and He can do it again ! God can bring unspeakable good for mankind out of enormous evils and turn world-griefs into world-salvation.

Have faith in God ; ' believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' O England, ' and thou shalt be saved ! ' Believe in His lordship of the nations, in His management of the world-empire the Father has given Him. I shall not soon forget the words a simple Yorkshire Methodist used in prayer one Sunday night after I had been preaching on this theme some months ago. He had been a wagoner, I imagine, who had sometimes driven his horses on a misty and frosty night in winter. ' Lord,' he said, ' Thoo hasn't dropped the reins, and Thi' fingers isn't cramped wi' frost ; nor Thi' eyes dimmed wi' onny mist ! ' Yes, our

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Divine Master holds the reins, and He has got the team in hand ; and if we trust Him, He will bring us grandly through, over the rough track, and through the dark night, and despite the wild plunges of the rebel nations. His purposes are ripening fast !

XVII

THE BOOK OF DESTINY

And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth.—REV. v. 9-10.

THE mysterious 'book' of the sublime scene of this chapter is surely the book of human destiny, containing the fate of men and nations. That the volume is written both 'within and on the back,' a circumstance unusual in ancient books because of the brittleness of the paper that was used, indicates the overflowing fullness of its matter. It is 'close sealed with seven seals' by way of representing the strict concealment of its contents, the inscrutability of the riddle of human life. Yet this dread problem is not, after all, insoluble. There is a meaning, a thread of purpose, running through man's history; the riddle which confronts us each on our birth into this world, has an answer, could we but discover it. Life is 'a mighty maze, but not

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without a plan.' The vision of 'the book' in the right hand of the Eternal and the All-wise, tells us as much as this; for *a book* implies something rational and orderly, a question thought out, an account balanced and settled. The Seer supposes that if he could unfasten those seals and unroll the volume, he would find the clue to the great world-puzzle. Hence his tears. The knowledge is there, a world-plan exists in the counsels of Eternal Wisdom ; but he is powerless, and all men and angels are equally powerless, to unlock the mystery. The insight of genius, the research and speculation of the ages, have been baffled by this task. 'I wept much,' he writes, 'because no one was found worthy to open the book nor to look thereon.' What thinking man has not shared those tears, as he has pondered the contradictions and wrestled with the problems of our individual and collective destiny, as he has contemplated the strange ironies and bewildering paradoxes besetting us each, which we are impotent to master and yet cannot put aside? What, is *no one* competent for this inevitable task? Is life to remain for ever a mockery to our intelligence? Are reason and fact to be endlessly at variance? Stay, says the Heavenly Voice, let those tears be dried; the Interpreter is found, One who 'hath prevailed to open the book and its seven seals.'

The Solver of life's mystery is introduced under

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a double symbol : He is at once the Lion and the Lamb. The image of the Lion speaks for strength, courage, majesty in the conqueror. Let us not forget that these are prime attributes in our Redeemer ; He is something much more than the ' Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' of our childhood's prayers. He is seen in this vision as ' the Lion of the tribe of Judah,' and ' the Root of David,' since He comes of the chosen stock of our race and is at the root of all its greatness ; He is the heir of the promises of God and of the best aspirations of mankind. In this character God's ancient people expected the Redeemer, looking for ' the Lion of Judah ' who should leap on to the stage of history scattering His foes and seizing David's vacant throne. But, in His place, ' Behold, the Lamb of God,' a Saviour meek, patient, ' dumb before His shearers,' offering Himself unresisting to the sacrificial knife, ' a Lamb as it had been slain ! ' ' His own received Him not ' ; they could not see the lion in the lamb. This is too common a mistake. Jesus Christ contains in His nature the widest contradictions, the most astonishing surprises. He is Himself a part of the problem He has to unriddle ; He shares in the baffling experiences He is called to interpret.

But look again, for the scene changes as you gaze upon it. ' A Lamb,' you saw, ' as it had been slain ' ; but that Lamb does not remain stricken in death,

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a hapless victim. He is 'standing,' erect and alive once more ! Yes, and 'having seven horns and seven eyes,' armed, that is to say, with perfect strength and perfect intelligence : it is the risen Christ, the Bearer of Sin and the Conqueror of Death, who hath prevailed to open the sealed book of fate. Into the charge of this Meek Majesty, the slain and risen Lion-Lamb, all human destinies are committed by the Almighty Father. Jesus Christ is the interpreter and dispenser of life's final issues, for men and for nations. If men fail to recognize His grand office, there are those more discerning who know how to honour our Redeemer. 'When He had taken the book,' the vision proceeds, 'the four Living Creatures,' who stand in St. John's symbolism for the powers of Nature and Creation, and 'the four and twenty Elders,' representing the great congregation of the redeemed of old, 'fell down' in worship 'before the Lamb' ; they rise to 'sing' their 'new song' the refrain of which is evermore, 'Worthy art Thou !'

The heavenly song, which resounds through the Apocalypse, acclaims the Crucified as holding the clue to history ; it points to Jesus Christ as the Solver for the world, and for us each, of the riddle of life. And reasons are given for this lofty praise ; St. John's teaching is everywhere as full of logic as it is of poetry. 'Worthy art Thou,' they cry,

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‘to take the book and to open the seals thereof : for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God men of every tribe and nation, and madest them into a kingdom, madest them priests unto our God and kings for ever !’ The competence of the Lion-Lamb is grounded upon His death of sacrifice ; it is verified by the measure of redemption He has already accomplished. Such is the reasoning of the Heavenly Singers. They see the basis laid for the solution of the world-problem. They are satisfied that the solution is in worthy and capable hands ; they have seen enough to assure them that all the perplexities of human life will be in the end unravelled and every page in the book of fate read out and made clear.

‘ Worthy art Thou to take the book, for Thou wast slain ’ : *the mastery of Christ is grounded upon His death*. It is as ‘ the Lamb slain ’ that the mighty voices sounding in the Scripture continually exalt the Lord Jesus. Calvary is the focus of human history ; the Cross is the pivot on which the world’s destiny turns. All mysteries centre there, all solutions begin there. To the end of time the death of Jesus Christ will shine out as fresh and glorious and divine as ever, and yet more potent and universal in its scope.

The writer does not dwell on the term he uses, and uses so often, ‘ the Lamb slain ’ ; a word was

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enough with the facts freshly in view, and the imagery was familiar. The expression 'slain,' in the language St. John employs, did not signify mere 'death,' not death as it might come by accident or in the course of nature, nor a mere death by violence; it belongs to the speech of the altar. The 'slain' is the 'immolated.' One who has fallen in sacrifice, a sacred, chosen victim. The term recalls what Jesus Himself had foretold, and what His Apostles taught, concerning the causes and the meaning of His blood-shedding.

It is something that the Son of God has 'tasted death.' He understands the world and men as one only can do who has gone down to the depths, who has not only shared our life in its breadth and fullness, but our death also in its pain and fearfulness. But there was far more in the Lord's dying than this. It was not His *own* death that He died as a matter of isolated personal experience; for Jesus Himself, by Himself, death could surely have had no sting, since He 'had done no violence, neither was deceit in His mouth,' the sting of it and the shame of it lay in man's sin against God. It was *our* death—the sinner's death—that Jesus made His own: 'He by the grace of God tasted death for every man.' Jesus died a world-death, that embraced in its scope and purpose our whole humanity. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ stood

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in a profound appropriative relation to 'the sin of the world.' There, as St. Paul has taught us, is 'the sting of death' for men; and Jesus Christ set His breast against that sting and took unto Himself its full force of malignity and venom that He might shield His fellows. 'He was made sin for us,' so the Apostle states the mystery of the Atonement, 'that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' He identified Himself with human sin; He stood, the divinely innocent in a world of sinners, and Himself met the full shock of the evil consequences its sin brought upon the world, that we in our turn might be set in His place and become one with the righteousness of God which we lay hold of in Him. It was this atoning mind and purpose, this filial and brotherly reconciling love, which gave to the death on Calvary its unique character. Jesus Christ went to the root of the tremendous problem of the sin of the race against its Maker and dealt with it atoningly. With open eyes, in perfect brotherly love toward His condemned brothers, and in perfect filial submission on their behalf to the Father's holy law, Jesus died the death due to sinners. In this fashion He 'offered Himself without spot to God' on behalf of those all-spotted with sin's foul infection. And so doing, 'He hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself'; He 'hath loosed us from our sins in His blood.'

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Now sin is the cause of all our difficulties, the riddle within the riddle of man's fate. Is it not admitted for instance, in the case of the recent monstrous and cruel war, that human pride and greed, jealousy and hate, are at the bottom of it all ? We charged these causes upon our enemies ; they threw back the guilt on us ; both are agreed in taxing this hideous crime upon the sin of the world. And how often the individual man has to say : ' Oh if it were not for that false step, that bitter and cruel word, that lapse from rectitude or from purity, how unspeakably happier and better my history might have been ! I have poisoned for myself the wells of life by my own misdoings ! ' The whole miserable mess and tragedy of man's sorrowful lot lies coiled up in this mystery of iniquity ; all the main streams of evil we can trace up to this one bitter spring. He who can deal effectually with the sin of the world and can bring men back to God out of their estrangement and entanglement, has settled the grand question. There is nothing too hard for Him in the way of relief and amelioration ; the rest of the explanation is a mere sequel to this. Jesus Christ, by His availing sacrifice for sins, once offered, has found the clue to the world-problem ; He has forged the key which fits the lock of man's prison house, and has the right to proclaim liberty to the captive, the opening of the prison to

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them that are bound. Everything will right itself for men and nations, when they are once set right with God. If the Lion-Lamb has truly effected this, He may well go up to the throne and 'take the book' of destiny and 'loose the seals thereof.'

The Sin-bearer is the Problem-solver, the Looser of the sealed mysteries, the Reader of the book of human fortunes. We may confidently await from the hands of Jesus Christ the settlement of life's accounts.

But the heavenly song goes further in its justification of the homage rendered to the Lion-Lamb. It asserts that *the mastery grounded upon His atoning death is proved by deeds of actual redemption*: 'Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men out of every tribe and tongue !'

This is put, you observe, in the past tense, in terms of accomplished fact. It is the language of history and experience, not of prophecy or theory. The first-fruit has been given the world of 'the salvation which is in Jesus Christ with eternal glory.' In the view of the Seer, the Redeemer has by this time wrought redemption for His people to a degree which gives security for the fulfilment of all the promises of God in Him. He has explained so much to us, that we may trust Him to unfasten the last of those tremendous seals, to spell out the entire

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mystery of life and the world. In other words, the realized results of Christianity warrant us in the confidence that the Redeemer's death will achieve its complete purpose.

The singers of the new song see a pledge of this in the world-wide efficacy of the gospel: 'Thou didst redeem for God men out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.' This book was written toward the close of the first century, perhaps sixty years after the Atoning Death. The writer's horizon extended to and beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire, embracing the Mediterranean shores and their hinterlands, where representatives of all human kindreds were mingled. And amongst this swarm and surge of peoples, every sort of men had by this date been touched by the spell of the Cross; every dialect had learnt to hymn the name of Jesus.

This triumphant declaration is truer for us to-day. Our view ranges over a vastly larger field. The world of the Mediterranean shores has spread into that of the Seven Seas and the Five Continents. The list of participants in the baptism of the Day of Pentecost, which fills two verses of the Acts of the Apostles, has grown into a catalogue that it would take us hours to recite with any intelligence. In the twentieth century we see millions redeemed to God by the Lamb's blood out of peoples and

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tongues utterly beyond the ken of the Seer who penned these glowing words as he listened to the Song of the Heavenly Chanters.

With what amazement and delight the Apostles of Jesus would fashion creatures like ourselves into men conformed to the image of His Son, worthy to be His priests in this temple of the earth and to rule as kings over the world that He has made, and in loftier realms beyond! St. John has seen such souls called into being, men of every tribe and kindred translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, out of anarchy into a Divine order, out of shameful licence into purity, out of hatred and strife into a holy brotherhood. It was the beholding of this immense and far-spreading work of redemption effected within his life-time, which gave the aged Apostle the certainty of all that he predicts concerning the world-victories of the Cross in the closing book of Scriptures. Let us take comfort to ourselves from the same source in these direful days; for our eyes too have seen God's salvation, our innermost heart has proved its truth and power. Let us raise high the song of the Heavenly Watchers, who looked from the beginning to the end of the mystery of God and of the age-long tragedy of human life. He who has begun a good work in mankind will perfect it unto the day of Christ. God's world-work has a

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far wider range, and takes longer far to complete than His first workmen could anticipate ; but its finishing is sure, and will be all the grander for the delay. That God is at work in the strange happenings of our time, both His mercies and His judgements prove. The harvest of His sowing is as certain as autumn after spring. Wearily the months stretch out : many a drought and many a flood comes between promise and fulfilment ; but every hour His purposes are ripening : sunshine and storm work together for the golden reaping. See that you have your share in it !

XVIII

THE RELIGIOUS BASIS OF FAMILY LIFE

*Except the Lord build the house,
They labour in vain that build it :
Except the Lord keep the city,
The watchman waketh but in vain.*—Ps. cxxvii. 1.

THIS is a text for the founders and rulers of great cities, but equally for any honest young couple planning to set up a home of their own. It reveals the intimate association between God and the human household. The sentiment he expresses, to the Hebrew poet's mind was literally true. House-rearing, or the erection of city walls, was felt to be a religious employment : the mason was a kind of priest ; the foundations were laid, and the top-stone brought on with pious ceremony and shoutings of, ' Grace, grace unto it ! ' The whole work was placed under God's express oversight and benediction. It were well if this ancient sense of the Divine concern in the construction of human dwellings prevailed amongst ourselves, and that the wickedness of bad housing and ' jerry-building,'

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and of the exaction of excessive rents in which house-owners take covetous advantage of their poorer neighbours' necessities, were more deeply considered and it were understood that Almighty God keeps a strict eye on all such doings and is an avenger of every avaricious gain made at the expense of the health and decent living of a fellow man.

But, to be sure, the material structure is only the shell for the moral and social fabric built within it. The household within the house, the people within the city walls, that is 'the house,' or 'city,' in the deeper sense of the word : that most of all is God's building, God's abode, the sphere and the manifestation of His diviner skill.

And do you notice, in this double sentence, how by the very form of the Hebrew verse the two objects are identified, the house and the city, domestic and civic welfare? The 'Builder of the house' and the 'Keeper of the city' are one ; householder and citizen have a common interest and are the objects of an equal and Divine solicitude ; what makes for the well-being of the one, at the same time serves the other. All sound political science confirms the Israelite poet's implied belief, that good fathers and mothers, happy and healthful homes, are the first conditions for the existence of a prosperous civil community. Behind the school, the city, the nation, the manifold organizations and on-goings

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of social life, stands *the home*, from which every other institution draws its material. Let home life decay, let domestic love and purity be blighted, then rottenness sets in at the very core of municipal and national existence. The English home has been the fountain and nursery of all that is worthy in our country's character and noble in its history. Robert Burns was in some ways a sad prodigal, but he was a great and inspired poet ; and never more so than in *The Cottar's Saturday Night* when, after painting in lines of exquisite pathos the Scottish household gathered in worship round the hearth, he cried, 'From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs!' If the world would know the secret of the power, endurance, and skill the British peoples have shown, and of their loyal family unity which has saved the race and the empire in the tremendous struggle of the four years past, that line reveals it !

In the light of these reflexions I ask you to consider, first, the *vital connexion of religion with family life* ; and more particularly, as arising from this, the *duty of domestic worship*.

That God and home are profoundly kindred, that religion is essentially bound up with family relationships, nature itself goes far to teach us. The ancient Romans, mightiest of all races in warlike and political achievement, realized this when in their majestic Latin tongue, they used one and

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the same word, *pius*, to denote reverence for the gods and affection for one's parents; and the Hebrews also, when, in their Ten Commandments, they set in parallel lines at the head of the Two Tables of the Law, the worship paid to the One God and the honouring of father and mother—'true to the kindred points of heaven and home!'

In what we call secular matters of trade or politics, of art or science or literature, you may carry on in a certain fashion without ostensible regard to God. Religious and irreligious men meet in these walks of life; the methods on which they proceed, the aims they pursue, are on the surface scarcely distinguishable, though at the bottom, doubtless, in the inner motives and the final issue there is a wide distinction. But when you return home and the door is shut upon the world, when the children clamber on to your knee, it is quite another matter! Who is there with proper sensibilities, in any home worth calling home, that is not at times conscious *there* of some higher, holier Presence, making the home a sanctuary? Who is there that does not feel the need of a tenderer and more potent influence than any which material resources can furnish, to mould and build the house? To touch the hearts of these little ones, to form their consciences, to shape their plastic, wonderful young natures into moral worth and beauty, the working of a wisdom and a love far,

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far beyond our own is requisite: God must help us, fathers and mothers, or our weak, blundering hands will wreck the precious lives committed to our charge. 'Except the Lord build the house,' unless God is there, inspiring, directing, over-ruling parental action and example, creating the atmosphere and spirit of the house, 'they labour in vain that build it'; without Him the family grows up selfish, proud, coarse, quarrelsome, unlovely. One can understand a strong and well-equipped young man setting out on secular business in self-sufficiency; but one wonders at and pities the father who can look on the baby-creature placed in his arms without a great cry going up from his heart at that moment to the Fountain of life and of wisdom! Then, if never before, the man realizes his need of God. It is the parental instinct, deep in the soul of every right-feeling man, to turn to Him 'from whom all fatherhood in heaven and upon earth is named.'

Experience confirms the intuitive conviction which binds home and God together. Any one who has observed the course of society around him over a considerable tract of years, who has watched intelligently for two or three generations the rise and decay of families or traced their course across the field of history, will confirm, I think, the maxim of the Psalmist. He will testify that no house can stand the shock of time that has not true religion

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for its central pillar, that has not chosen God for its Builder and Maker. Nowhere does ungodliness tell more quickly, or bring more sure and sad disaster, than in the circle of the family and in the nursing and upbringing of our children. So much nature and experience unite to teach us.

And this is the solemn, affectionate, continual witness of Divine revelation, as that is embodied, for instance, in our text. God claims to be the household God, the Father of fathers, the stay of our age, the guide of our youth ; from the first pages of Scripture to the last He asserts this character and insists on this position. He knocks at the door of every house. Read the tale of Adam and Eve in Paradise, of ' man's first disobedience ' to his Maker and its sequel in the murderous strife of Cain with Abel perpetuated to this present hour. Then, if you will, run through the history of Abraham, the friend of God and the father of the faithful, in whom the life of mankind made a new beginning, the founder of the Israelite religion which is essentially a family covenant. Then come down to Jesus Christ, Son of man and Son of God ; and see how the world's true faith had its birthplace under the Nazareth cottage-roof, where the error of Eden was repaired. All along the home has been God's resort amongst men, the seat of His power, the sanctuary where He delights to dwell, the citadel of

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religion. Here He would walk and talk with men His children. 'The fact that in the supreme revelation, in the doctrine of the New Testament, God is known as '*Father, Son, and Spirit,*' speaks volumes as to the domestic nature of Christianity, as to the profound correspondence existing between the fundamental human relationships and the nature and knowledge of the Godhead.

Then you will admit, surely, that the necessity and value of *domestic worship* form an inevitable deduction from what has been advanced. If the wedded couple have a true reverence for life and for God, if there is sanctity in their love, it is bound to manifest itself in this form ; by instituting family worship from the outset, they expressly found their home and begin their housekeeping (as St. Paul would say) 'in the Lord.' Granted but one of the two to be faithfully Christian, according to the Apostle's teaching, the dwelling is thereby hallowed and constituted a house of prayer. When children come and one by one are baptized in the 'Triune Name, a new bond is contracted to this effect, and a further necessity arises for the family altar. Without its existence how can the house be, or profess to be, a religious home ?

In numberless instances the crucial test as to the religious character of the household is the observance of domestic worship ; its maintenance or neglect

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determines whether God shall, or shall not, be the builder of that house. This institution supplies perhaps the surest index of the state of religion in the nation, at any rate amongst a Protestant people who do not surrender the offices of worship to the clergy. The priesthood of the father is exercised and is vindicated at the family altar.

How, I ask, are the children, or the servants, to recognize that the heads of the house believe in God, when they do not care enough about Him, or realize His presence sufficiently, to pray with them? How shall they understand that God is in the house, supplying the daily bread and filling home with health and happiness, when there is no common thanksgiving paid to Him, no united supplication for His blessing? The parents may thoughtlessly suppose that prayer in the secret chamber, and the public worship of sanctuary and school are sufficient: nay, but they are dropping the essential link between the two! And they renounce by this neglect the very crown of parenthood, the privilege and dignity of priesthood in the house; while they rob their children of one of the most moving experiences and sacred memories life affords, the sight of father and mother kneeling amongst their offspring at the throne of grace, the sound of their voices pleading with the Almighty Father on their behalf.

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There is another serious question I beg you to consider : how is God to bless a household which does not think it worth while to seek His blessing, which expresses no gratitude for His good gifts, no sense of need for His succour, which proceeds from morning to night, and from one week's end to another, so far as any common recognition of His presence is concerned, as though He were not ? The Apostle Paul speaks of some professedly Christian householders of his own day who practically ' denied the faith and were worse than unbelievers ' : the condemnation comes very nearly home to our discarders of domestic worship. I remember well when I travelled in India seeing in a long street at dawn the housewives tracing each with her fingers a pattern on the doorstep. I asked what it meant, and was told this was an act of religion ; she was drawing the symbol of the household god, that all who passed might see whom the household worshipped as its deity ; and this was her first duty every day. And if you entered and were admitted to the intimacy of the house, you would find an image on a shelf or in a niche in the chief room, to which each inmate was expected to resort once in the day to pay his worship and recite his prayer. No wonder, I thought, that Hinduism is entrenched in the people's hearts, since it is blended with the daily life of home ; aye, and as little wonder

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that our own pure and blessed religion, lacking expression within the home, has so weak and uncertain a hold on many of its children, and that Methodist parents in such numbers are mourning over sons and daughters estranged from God, when they have not led them to Him at the altar of the house !

I know the excuses offered for the unhappy failure. *Lack of ability* and *lack of time* are the commonest of these. Many heads of families feel that they have not the requisite gifts of utterance for conducting family prayer. Well, I sympathize with these ; few have been more conscious of this deficiency than I. But the defect can be remedied at a trifling cost by the purchase and use of one or other of the excellent manuals of Household Devotion prepared for the purpose. *Read* prayers are vastly better than none ! And yet, I am sure, it is better to pray at home in one's own broken and faltering words than to read the most finished and appropriate forms prepared by another. The children are not critics ; the help of God's good Spirit is promised for such infirmities. It is the first step in these matters that costs so much ; where there is a devout and sincere heart, facility will come by exercise.

The want of time, due to the pressure and drive of modern business, makes a real difficulty in many

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households. People say to you : ' Daily prayer in the family is a beautiful and touching thing ; but it is for people of leisure, not for those who like ourselves are hurried in the morning, off to our engagements in different directions and often at different times ; and who come home tired and late at night. Family worship is *crowded out* under such conditions.' But what you declare to be impracticable is actually done, done by some of the busiest, and most successfully busy, householders even in these days. They are men who recognize domestic worship as a matter of first importance, and therefore make it a fixed and primary engagement in the order of the day, an appointment with God.

Those who plead this excuse, busy as they are, can find time for a hundred things of incalculably less importance than domestic worship. It is after all a question of the relative importance one attaches to the various demands upon one's time. With proper arrangements and a little decent self-denial, and with a right sense of duty to God and to the family, one can surely clear a space of five or ten minutes for the household to kneel down together to adore the Creator and Preserver, to give thanks for common mercies, and to ask a blessing upon the labours of the day. The more exacting our duties, the more pressing and anxious our family cares, so much the more needful is resort to the throne of

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grace. Time is never wasted which is spent there. Those who know the power of prayer to lighten the daily burden, to bring calmness, cheerfulness, patience, insight, to sweeten the temper and to quicken the better sympathies, know that amongst its other benefits it is a great economizer of time and strength. The family altar is the best guardian of family peace and love, the bond of life's vows, the source of its sweetest memories ; it has been the palladium of the English home, the safeguard and the glory of our Protestant Christianity. Let us maintain it at any cost, at any sacrifice ; let us restore God's altar in the house where it is broken down. For its maintenance is vital to the things that matter most, in the household and in the nation alike.

XIX

GOD'S MESSAGE

When your ears received God's message from us, you welcomed, not the word of men, but as it truly is, the word of God, which accordingly worketh in you that believe.—I THESS. ii. 13.

THIS sentence recalls to us vividly the impression made by the preaching of the first ministers of Christ on their believing hearers, and the consciousness in which they themselves spoke. *God's* message had come through this channel; the messengers themselves were comparatively nothing, one hardly thought of them. As when Paul writes, 'Now faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,' he means to say that when God in very deed speaks by the mouth of a man, his fellows listen and believe to purpose. In neither of these places is the Apostle thinking of the written, but of the speaking word, not of the word in the Book, but the word of God on the lips of a God-charged man. Scripture itself is the product and deposit of the spoken word, and becomes its norm and regulative canon, not its substitute. The Bible

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falls dead and powerless from the hands of an un-inspired ministry, such as were the Jewish scribes of our Lord's day. Men are looking and listening in all quarters, critically or wistfully, for 'proof of Christ speaking in' us.

Let us at all times remember that in respect to the gospel we are nothing but channels and mouth-pieces for Another ; the Church itself is only a body for the living Spirit of God, dead at every point where that Spirit is not. I confess that I feel a little uneasy about the modes of expression very common with us just now, when we talk habitually of 'the Church's message,' 'the historic message of Methodism,' and the like, and are casting about to define 'our message,' seeking to realize for ourselves and make clear to others what the Church has to say to the age in which we live. I do not wish to quarrel with these phrases ; they are justifiable, and may be necessary for certain purposes ; but I do feel that we must get behind and beyond them, we must penetrate far beneath them if we are to touch the spring of spiritual power and to get the momentum for a real advance. On occasion the Apostle also will speak of 'my gospel' or 'our gospel' ; ten times as often it is 'the gospel of God,' 'the gospel of Christ,' 'God's good news concerning His Son.' *He* sent it forth by the first messengers ; He is always sending it, when it really marches and goes ! You

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and I have no property in the message whatever. The real communication always lies between the living God and the living world. If He chooses, in the sovereignty of His grace, to speak through us, it is an infinite honour and joy ; if He finds another spokesman more to His mind, readier to His hand, let Him do as seemeth Him good. God has not deposed Himself in the selection of His agents ; His prerogative has been delegated neither to Pope nor Conference. If a Church in anywise presumes upon the message as lodged with her and emanating from her, she will find herself disowned. ' What is Paul ? or what is Apollos ? ' the Apostle asks : ' ministers through whom ye believed, as the Lord gave to each. . . . Neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth anything ; but God that giveth the increase.' These are things we can hardly repeat too often to ourselves.

You will not misunderstand me if I say that even Scripture may be a snare to us in this respect, if we make it a substitute for the living God. God's word is heard there as nowhere else ; and the revelation made in that book is central and controlling. But Divine truth is not warehoused there, bottled up, one may say, so that it has only to be decanted from the Bible and drawn off in exposition and doctrinal inference, by skilled textual combination and ingenious application to modern affairs. Such

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preaching may be as dead as the old Rabbinism, unless there is the authentic touch upon it, the thrill of an Unseen Presence, unless the words of Jesus, as He said, are 'spirit and life' upon the reciter's lips, respoken by Himself. And surely when God wants to say something to an age, or to a single assembly, and has put His hand on the man for the purpose, there is no trouble about defining or recognizing the message: 'the lion hath roared,' cries Amos, 'who will not fear; the Lord Jehovah hath spoken, who can but prophesy?' Or hear the Psalmist's exordium: 'The mighty God, even Jehovah, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof.' At such epochs, for such men, the message is sun-clear and world-wide!

Is it not possible that Churches; as well as individuals, suffer at times from an excess of self-consciousness, self-importance? Most of us know, unhappily, how disabling in public matters an acute self-consciousness is apt to be; the modern psychology has its dangers in this direction. I am not speaking of selfishness, of self-seeking; but there is a self-assurance, a self-attention which belittles and enfeebles. When the larger tides of feeling come upon us, when any great common passion or enthusiasm seizes us, self is submerged, is clean forgotten. The man who has never been

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beside himself, never been carried off his feet (as we say), has never disappeared from his own eyes and become a thing of naught, has never breasted the mighty floods. And this defect may befall communities and Churches no less than it may befall individual men. If England has shown herself great in the present war crisis, it is because for an hour at least she was in a fine frenzy, lifted out of herself, and ready to stake everything upon humanity and the honour of the plighted word.

Now I claim to be as convinced and attached a Methodist as any brother here, but I cannot but feel that our beloved Methodism for some time past has had Methodism too much upon the brain ; that she talks, plans, studies for herself, and is occupied with her own *personalia*, on the platform and in newspapers, in a way that does not bespeak spiritual health. From this cause the rest of the world gets somewhat bored with us, and possibly, which is infinitely worse, the Spirit of God is displeased. The self-consciousness of a Church, I am not saying the self-conceit or self-aggrandisement (we are not guilty of that), but the self-sensitiveness of a Church may be so active and pre-occupying, that its God-consciousness dwindles and fades. ' We are sober ' enough manward, O that we might, sometimes at least, be ' beside ourselves unto God ! '

Herein is that saying true : ' He that loveth his

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life (his self) shall lose it.' We deprecate absorption in the affairs of Society or Circuit at the expense of the Connexion ; is it not equally possible, and similarly dwarfing, for a single limb in the Body of Christ, however large and vigorous, in its devotion to its own duties and concern for its own growth and advancement, to be oblivious in any wise of the larger interests of God's kingdom and deaf to some of the things He is speaking, or wanting to have spoken, to the living, suffering world of to-day ? I do not intend in the least to reflect upon the attitude of Wesleyan Methodism toward movements for federation and the like ; I am thinking solely of the religious horizon, the denominational pre-occupation of our people, and the impression given by our current talk and writing. Forgive me, and correct me, if I am misjudging ; but I am jealous lest our dear mother Church should stand in her own light at this critical time, and should lose something of her life in her very eagerness for conservation—for want of '*looking away to Jesus.*'

One could imagine a reservoir in some chain of water-courses, intently aware of its function and its responsibility for the thirsty mouths it supplies, which should be so dutiful upon that side, so absorbed in the care of the outflow, that it half forgets the springs in the great hills above it, and fails to keep open and clear the feeding channels, and to deepen

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them as the drain on its resources grows. Year by year the inflow diminishes, the level sinks, the waters stagnate. Is not this a parable of a Church too self-concerned and self-contained, which toils hard for the people but gives too little of its mind and strength to God in prayer and meditation in converse with Scripture and thought about the great doctrines and the deep things of His kingdom within and about us, which keeps its eyes dwelling on the flats, when it should be lifting them 'to the hills from whence cometh our help?'

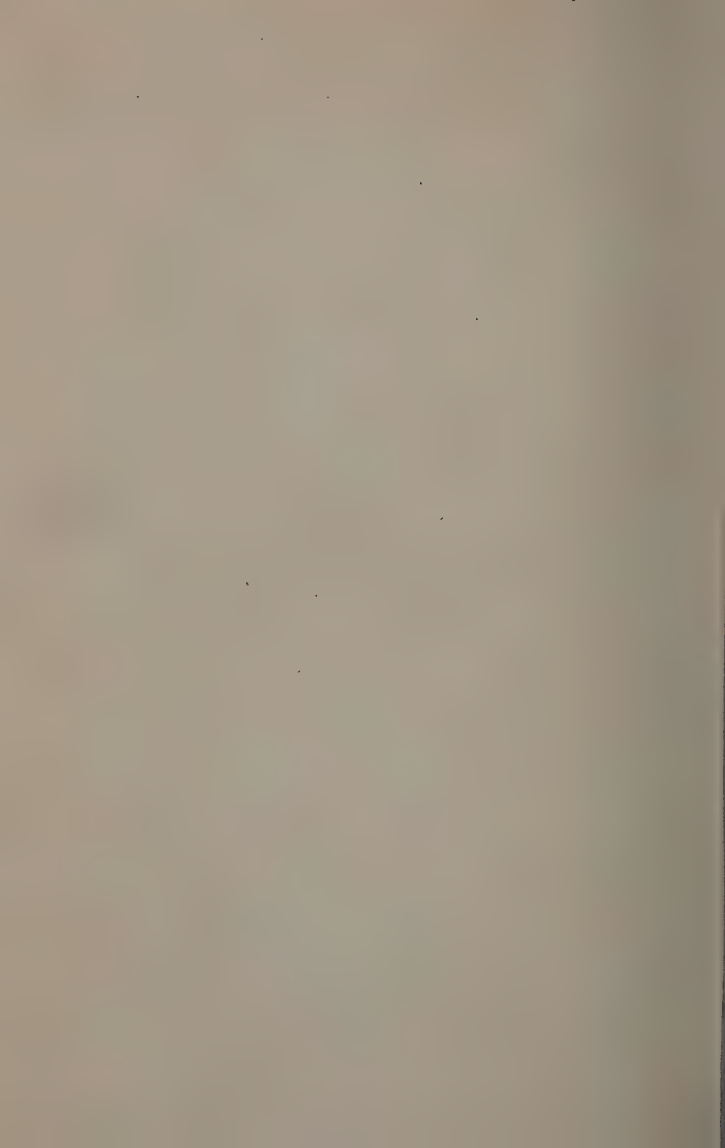
Will you suffer me to ask whether something like this has not in part befallen us ; and whether Methodism would not bulk wholesomely less in our discussions and anxieties and show herself less of a valetudinarian, feeling her pulse and watching and weighing her symptoms, if she were taken up vastly more with God and with the living Christ, and with the surging tides of life in the struggling, suffering, thinking world of men around us? I am not speaking to excuse or encourage any neglect of official business, or indifference to Connexional interests ; but our treasure and our hearts, after all, are not *there*. I am deeply convinced that, if we are to see spiritual advance, we must set our eyes in the right direction, and 'seek,' with a renewed, consuming ardour, 'the things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.'

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I have tried to emphasize the first word of my title, 'God's message.' I had wished to speak further on 'God's *message*,' as the Apostle indicates it, for example, in its main burden laid upon him, in the words of 2 Corinthians v. 20: 'We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating you through us, we beseech you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God.' I can only quote the text and leave it there. Plainly 'the world' is not, as a whole, 'reconciled to God' to-day; and while it remains unreconciled, this embassy is undischarged, and the Christian ministry has this still for its essential task, to bring God to men, to bring men to God. The ambassador must be charged with his Sovereign's mind and purpose, and he must somehow reach the rebels and succeed in conveying to them the message of grace.

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